

# IRELAND RISING IN THE NORTH



**BIG  
FLAME**

20p

# BIG FLAME

*Big Flame is a revolutionary socialist organisation. We are publishing this pamphlet on Ireland because we hope it is of use to the Irish revolution. The class struggle being fought in Ireland is of absolute importance for the Irish working class, for the English working class and for working class power everywhere. Yet it is hugely misunderstood, even on the left here. We must understand the importance and content of that struggle. The strength of the working class is international. The struggle of our brothers and sisters in the Catholic ghettos of the Six Counties of Ireland occupied by our bosses' army is our struggle too.*

*Few current struggles show more how the creativity and revolutionary power of the working class are built. In Ireland, it is a power that has been built in the ghettos, not by factory workers striking, but by housewives, unemployed people, kids. It will be the success or failure of their struggle that will determine the possibility of socialism in Ireland and in England. As long as the working class believes it has more in common with its own bosses than with the Irish working class, by chauvinism, then its ability to build a socialist society is weakened.*

*We see this ability every time working class people force their demands on the bosses, whether it's workers forcing their demands on management; tenants collectively winning what they want from councils, or women forcing the state to change its laws on contraception and abortion. This energy is also present, of course, in the well-publicised strikes and occupations of carworkers and miners. But it is also present in the less well-publicised struggles of local women fighting for a new nursery, of small factories that are occupied, of hospitals being forced to ban private patients.*

*And, in Ireland, it is the whole of the Catholic ghettos that is pitted against the imperialist power of Britain. It is an extremely important battleground of class war, fought against our bosses, and it must be won*

*When we talk of 'vanguards of the working class', we mean all sections of the working class who are in struggle, not just those at the point of production. Nowhere is this more clear than in Ireland, where the vanguards of the struggle are mostly unemployed. We see Big Flame's role as contributing as much as we can to the bringing together of the class vanguards in England. We believe that this coming together and our victories at the expense of capitalism are the revolutionary process. We do not think that a revolutionary party can be created by a few left-wing militants coming together and calling themselves a party. Only out of a new level of mass struggle and with the new vanguards emerging out of that struggle can the revolutionary party be built.*

*We are a Marxist organisation; but we are not Maoists, Stalinists or Trotskyists. We see ourselves as inheriting a revolutionary Marxist tradition which includes many revolutionaries, but we see their writings as the collective voice of the particular period of class struggle they were involved in. It's a tradition which also includes the revolutionary actions of working class people throughout history.*

*We hope that this pamphlet helps understanding of the mass struggle of the Irish working class and helps in building the Troops Out Movement which is currently the focus of Big Flame's activity around Ireland. The TOM is the main weapon we have. That is why we have worked within it since its foundation. We work in the interests of the Irish struggle. Our struggle is common.*

*Big Flame groups exist in Birmingham, Liverpool, Manchester and London. We are active in hospitals, car and other factories; among housewives, tenants and students. We also work in the Troops Out Movement and the Chile Solidarity Campaign. Nationally, our work is co-ordinated through Waged Workplace, Education, Women's and Ireland Commissions, and overall by a National Committee.*

**VICTORY TO THE IRISH REVOLUTION!**

**TROOPS OUT NOW!**

**SELF-DETERMINATION FOR THE IRISH PEOPLE AS A WHOLE!**

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# A PEOPLE AT WAR



## SIX YEARS ON

In 1969 the first bombs of the present troubles in the North of Ireland exploded. These bombs were the work of a Protestant organisation, the Ulster Volunteer Force. In 1968 the first Civil Rights march took place. Throughout 1969 the Catholic ghettos were constantly invaded by Protestants and by the forces of 'law and order' – the B-Specials, and by the police force, the RUC. Houses were burnt out; petrol bombs were thrown, and Catholics were shot and beaten dead. Thousands of Catholics were intimidated out of their homes. When the RUC was beaten off the streets of the Bogside in Derry, the British Army was sent in to maintain the Northern state and to pacify the Catholics.

Over the last six years, the pace and development of the Irish struggle has been staggering. It's moved on and on. And despite all the state violence, Army harassment and Loyalist murder gangs, it is still moving on. 1975 could well be the year of civil war – the final price the Catholic working class will have to pay in order to achieve their freedom. No amount of 'reason' and 'moderation' can halt this process. A major clash of this sort has been brewing for fifty years, ever since Ulster was set up as a separate state and a permanent second-class Catholic minority was press-ganged into what was for them a police state. The fifty-year inbuilt conflict of Ulster is coming to a head. And the solution – whatever it is – will be neither easy nor cheap.

### PARTITION

The Partition of Ulster in 1920 was the seed of the present crisis. And that Partition did not come out of the blue. It came because British imperialism wanted to keep a direct hold on the profitable industries in the North of Ireland (ship-building, engineering and textiles), and wasn't prepared to let them go with the rest of the country and 'Home Rule'. And, after all, it served the British bosses well that most of Ireland should be kept economically underdeveloped and deprived of the wealth of the Northern industries. That way meant Ireland remained a source of immigrant labour and cheap food for Britain.

Partition also suited the plans of the local bosses. They didn't want to lose their 'free trade' access to the British markets. Around them was the whole Protestant community – weaned on sectarian privileges in jobs, housing and political rights and determined to keep it that way. The unity of Protestant bosses and workers in defence of these privileges was cemented by the organisation of the *Orange Order*. This was at the core of the movement in Ireland – Loyalist and imperialist – to prevent self-determination for the whole of the Irish people. It was anti-democratic, being against the will of the majority of the whole Irish people, and it was anti-working class, putting imperialism first and

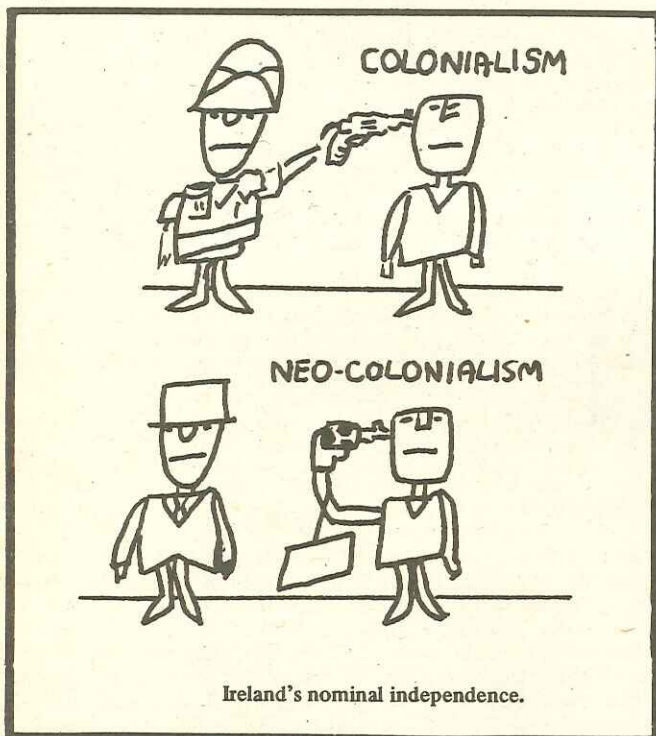
the Catholic working-class and peasants last. But in 1920 it was powerful enough to impose its will.

From that day onwards, Ulster was a police state, run exclusively by the Union (i.e. Tory) Party. The Protestant working class (with brief exceptions, such as the unemployment struggle in 1932) have backed up that state, and divided themselves off from the struggle and plight of their Catholic fellow-workers. And even the most democratic procedures were denied to the Catholics. It reaches the limits when, for instance, a two-thirds Catholic majority in Derry was prohibited – by a fixing of the election wards – from ever electing a majority to the City Council!

## THE BORDER FADES

Republicans fought against this artificial Ulster for fifty years. But unsuccessfully. And it's ironic that the first real winds of change were blown in by none other than British imperialism itself. (Though, of course, in its own selfish interests.)

Over the years the economic situation in Ireland changed. In the North there was a decline in the old industries – shipbuilding, linen and aircraft – and new investment was coming (and would have to come) from overseas, in growth industries such as synthetic fibres and chemicals. At the same time, economic policy was being changed in the South. Since Partition the Southern state had used protectionist policies to try to build up Irish capital. By the early 1960s it was clear that the development of Irish industry had been seriously held back by restrictions on trade and the lack of export markets. Between 1965 and 1970 Southern Ireland moved from being Britain's ninth largest export market to her third largest. The South was becoming increasingly important to Britain.



From 1962 on, the Southern government introduced many financial concessions to attract foreign investment. New investment, North and South, raised the question of the whole organisation of the Irish economy. In short, the border was being made redundant by the changes in the economy. New investors would want to be able to exploit the labour market as a *single* market, and would want to avoid duplicating their distribution networks, and avoid 'wasteful duplication of resources' and unnecessary 'competitive effort in agriculture, commerce and industry' (1973 White Paper on Sunningdale). So British imperialism, in particular, wanted to set Ireland gradually on the road to a united, federal set-up, dominated by London, so that all Ireland could be exploited equally.

## REFORMS AND BACKLASH

But, if support was to come from the South for steps toward a united, federal, capitalist Ireland, real change would have to take place in the North. The blatant discrimination against Catholics would have to be toned down. *This meant undermining the very basis of the Ulster state and the Protestant ascendancy.*

And here was the problem. Already a backlash had started. As the traditional Northern industries had declined and had been replaced by newer industries (often employing unskilled and Catholic workers), the Protestant working class had begun to see a threat to their relatively privileged position. As early as 1959 Ulster Protestant Action had been formed (by Ian Paisley among others) in order to 'keep Protestant and loyal workers in employment in times of depression, in preference to their Catholic fellow workers'. When it became obvious in the 1960s that pressures were coming from Britain for reform, the Protestant petit-bourgeoisie and working class really reacted. The Ulster Volunteer Force was re-formed in 1965. Bigoted demagogues like Paisley became popular Protestant leaders. When the Civil Rights marches started, reaction flared up.

The Civil Rights marches were started mainly by students and middle-class radicals, but soon drew support from the Catholic working class ghettos. The Catholics had been given hope by the talk of reform. The changes of the welfare state after the war had opened higher education to Catholics, and led to higher expectations, while social security payments removed some of the cutting edge of unemployment. The Civil Rights movement was the start of a process of Catholic working class people fighting for their needs – decent housing, more control over their lives, a rejection of the choice between low paid jobs or the dole.

But in fighting for their needs, the Catholic working class came into straight confrontation with the Northern Ireland state. While it was in Britain's interest that slow reforms should take place, the Catholic working class struggle for *immediate* change would have meant the destruction of the state in Northern Ireland and an end to the gradual economic and political changes that capital wanted. The only solution for the Northern state was repression.

For the Catholic working class, the choice was simple. Either to lie down and give up the struggle for its own needs or to confront the question of the state; to begin in a direct way the struggle to smash the sectarian Northern Ireland state which *directly* maintained their oppression and maintained the division in the working class. Essentially, this was the question which in 1969 divided the Irish Republican Army. The Provisionals were those who – for various reasons – saw the necessity to take up the national struggle. Among them were many of the 'hooligans' of the Battle of the Bogside, and similar battles in Belfast, who saw no hope of gaining any civil rights as long as Northern Ireland continued to exist as a separate state. The Officials were those who thought it possible to work for civil rights within Northern Ireland, and thereby to unify the working class. (The Officials were then, and still are, dominated by members of the Irish Communist Party.)

The Catholic working class chose to move forward – to continue to press their needs – and this brought them quickly into conflict with the state and with the Protestant working class, determined to defend their marginal privileges through defending the Protestant ascendancy. *In this way, the national question, i.e. the fight against the state, the colony of Ulster – is not an abstract idea but is question which has been posed directly as a part of the class struggle.*

The sections below are taken from interviews carried out in May '75 with people from minority areas in the North of Ireland who have been involved in the struggle. In the first section three women from the Ardoyne in Belfast describe the events of '69 and '70.



The demand for civil rights was met with police and Army violence.

## COMING INTO STRUGGLE

*What caused the attacks on the Catholic ghettos in 1969?*

**Bridie:** The Civil Rights march in '68. The people on the march were really beaten. This made people really angry. There was no IRA then. In '69, from Easter onwards, the Orangemen used to come down the Crumlin Road, beating their drums, painting on the church statues – 'Up The UVF' – and shout obscenities. Some of the Catholics are not great churchgoers, but they respect the church. In '69 the Protestants started stoning us. About the beginning of June it got so bad – and this has never been mentioned in the papers – that there was rioting with the police and the Protestants against the Catholics of Ardoyne for a full six weeks before the August troubles. This was every night from about 10 o'clock until 4 or 5 in the morning sometimes. The police used to run into Herbert Street and Hooker Street and throw CS gas in and try to catch people. If they caught anyone they beat hell out of them. They slaughtered them. The Orangemen used to follow the police in. We didn't call them Loyalists or Protestants then, just Orangemen. They'd follow the police in and start to smash the houses and then throw petrol bombs. They had the police to protect them from the people of the district. I seen the police turning round and joking with the people that were throwing petrol bombs. Not one of them was ever arrested.

**Ann:** The *hidings* that were going on in the streets! One night I was up at the top of Hooker Street and the police tender came flying round the corner and pinned this man against the wall. It deliberately mounted the footpath and pinned him against the wall twice. And the man was screaming blue murder. Then they pulled away and the people came out of their houses, even though they were getting hit; they came out and the B-Specials were kicking him. The Specials turned round – someone had already sent for a priest to anoint this man, and they wouldn't even let him. That man is lucky to be alive. He was going to die and he wasn't even throwing a stone.

Later on that night there seemed to be a lot of noise up on

the Crumlin and we thought, what's going on? So we went up to the end of the street and we couldn't get through, it was packed with police and B-Specials. But the people were coming down the street; people from the Crumlin Road. And those people were terrified – they were people who the Loyalists knew had not taken a part in any resistance to them. Well, the Loyalists gave them one minute to get out of their houses. But the police did not try to stop them burning their houses. Not one Loyalist was arrested. In Hooker Street about a quarter of the houses were burnt. At about twelve o'clock that night the police and B-Specials came round. I was upstairs watching, crouched down, for if they had of seen me at the window I'd have been shot dead. I turned round and heard the shooting in Herbert Street. That was the first time I'd heard shooting; I didn't know what it sounded like. I was terrified. And the next we heard was that a man in the next street who had been working on the buses all day had been shot dead. He'd only been back in his house for half an hour, and he went to pull down his window blind and the B-Specials shot him. And there was a young fellow of 14, two streets behind us, was shot dead.

**Eileen:** Every few minutes you'd see the people out in the streets, and they'd scatter because the jeeps were flying round the corner. And the ordinary people out on the streets made petrol bombs. They collected round the doors, good-living people; people who went to mass and communion. The IRA just wasn't involved in this area in '69, it was just the people. It was a case of they had to survive, self-preservation, that was it. People had to defend themselves, it was no good meeting violence with passive resistance. There was nothing here to defend this area with. The people hadn't a thing – only petrol bombs and stones. There wasn't a gun in the area. The IRA in the Ardoyne was not formed until October or November '69. There is this song about the boys of the Ardoyne, a couple of lines go: 'For Ardoyne's long-haired ones, revenge will be sweet'. That's the long-haired boys, the government tried to make them out as thugs, hooligans. They were not – they were our protectors, only for them there wouldn't be Ardoyne at the moment. They were all young: the oldest were about twenty-three. They were ten, eleven, twelve-up. Some

children of six were helping to break the stones for the eleven-year-olds upwards to throw. But it was all everybody helping one another.

*How was the British Army received in the Ardoyne?*

**Ann:** It was welcomed, it's no good saying it wasn't. People came out and brought them tea. And because there was sniping from the Loyalists still, the men used to do vigilante at street corners in case the Loyalists would come and attack. The women had collected wood for huts and for wee fires for these men to do vigilante. Four men would take it in turns throughout the night. Now, not one of these men were armed; the IRA still wasn't operating yet in this area. Now the reason that the Army was welcomed in this area at least was that the people had nothing left to defend themselves with. There was no foodstuffs left, there was nothing. The people hadn't organised themselves. And at the time the Army came in, the people were terrified because they knew that the B-Specials were massing that very night in Flax Street Mill (that's now an army barracks), to finish off the Ardoyne. And they'd warned us then, and they've said it since, but that night they were going to do it. They had warned us that they would flatten Ardoyne. Now, it's an easy thing to do. The Ardoyne is like a basin. There's twenty-two streets, and right around it is Shankhill, Silverstream, and so on, which are strong UDA areas. Not five minutes walk from here there's the UDA club, the Jolly Roger. That's how close they are. And there's Army posts around this area, six of them, yet they don't see cars coming into this area and attacking the people. Their cameras are going twenty-four hours a day yet they don't see them go in and they don't see them go out.

**Bridie:** Now up till October '69, the relationship between the Army and the people was excellent, everything the British government could have desired. Now in October '69 there was trouble between the Army and the Loyalists on the Shankhill Road, and that was the first time anyone had opened up on the British soldiers. It was the Protestants



British soldiers 'peace-keeping'?

who began that. And the Army turned round and began to be very hostile — against the Catholics! It wasn't the Catholics who were doing anything against the British Army at that time. They started searching houses and harassing people. They really just turned on the people, like it was orders: 'Cool the thing on the Shankhill and get stuck in on the Catholics.' And it gradually got worse into '70, and in early '70 the Provisional IRA was formed. It was an organised defence of the areas, that was all. A lot of people who joined it were just stone throwers and bottle throwers, but the IRA was *organised* to defend, and that's the only reason it started.

**Eileen:** If the Loyalists move in to attack the area, this is what happens. Once the Army has seen one shot fired back at the Loyalists, they move in on the Catholics and start sealing off streets, doing house-to-house raids and things like that. But they don't go into Loyalist areas. This happened in '72 — the Loyalists attacked the area and the IRA defended it, which was what everyone wanted them to do. We couldn't *live* without them at the moment. There's always a steady support for the IRA, and it's not just two or three people in each street, it's a lot more. I would say there are about fifty people in this street who support them all the way. If they aren't supporting it by being in it, they support it by opening their houses to them. And if there's trouble, the men and girls wouldn't have to kick in one door — no matter what the press would like you to think — not one. I've seen it myself. Every door would be left open, back and front. Sometimes the fellas and the girls would have to run down an alleyway to get away from the Brits, and all they have to do is to push the door and they can go right through the house. And there's not one piece of intimidation — there doesn't have to be. Not one. For the people know they can rely on the IRA. There's people in this district who won't even support the Green Cross, and that's money for Republicans inside, no matter what they're in the camps for — but when there's trouble, they'll leave their doors open. The IRA have proved themselves in '72 and numerous times since; people know they can rely on them.

## ARMY OCCUPATION: INTRODUCTION

In the six years that the British Army has been in force in Ireland there have been five clear stages in British policy. The first — described in the section above — was *containment of the Catholic rebellion*. By July 1970 the British Army spokesmen no longer referred to 'peacekeeping' but *counter-insurgency*; the Army was at war with the IRA. In August 1971 internment without trial was reintroduced. In January 1972 the Army's tactics were clearly seen when they murdered fourteen people on a peaceful demonstration — Derry's Bloody Sunday. The Army's intention, of opening fire to draw out the IRA and have a shoot-out, failed when the IRA didn't respond. It has proved impossible for the Army to cover over this episode of cold-blooded murder.

As Catholic resistance continued, the British government retreated. In March 1972 *Direct Rule* was introduced. The Catholic working class had smashed Stormont. But this policy led to strong opposition among the Loyalists, and the British government took the opportunity of taking over the Catholic no-go areas. Military repression and harassment were stepped up, while at the same time attempts were made to buy out 'moderate' Catholic opinion by offers of 'power-sharing' between the two communities and limited co-operation between the North and the South. The Ulster Workers' Council strike in May brought a final end to this policy. Since then, despite the truce, it's been clear that the 'solution' the British government will try for will involve some kind of *Loyalist takeover*.

For the Catholics, the British Army is a foreign army of occupation. At times as many as 22,500 troops have been in Northern Ireland. The intensity of army occupation has to be seen to be believed — constant raids on people's houses; constant searching on the streets. In 1974 the Army made 71,914 raids, almost all on Catholic houses. A comparable scale of raids in Britain would mean five million raids a year. The Army's intelligence system covers details of the lives of thousands of Catholics. Through the six years,

\*Areas free from police and Army rule.



Women protest after murders on Bloody Sunday.

new techniques have constantly been introduced: water cannons, rubber bullets, plastic bullets, lead bullets, CS and CR gas, 'sensory deprivation' torture techniques, army propaganda . . . the list is endless. This is Kitson's vision of how the Army can be used – not just to suppress rebellion as a military operation, but a combination of military, political and psychological measures to ensure capitalism survives.

In this section we have a report from Colm, Terry and Bridie of what Army occupation has meant in Derry and Belfast.

### IN DERRY

*What's it like having the British Army in your area?*

You'll not go into a street without seeing some sort of Army presence. You can be stopped any time by the Army and they'll ask your name, credentials, who lives next door, how many freckles there are on your elbow, and so on, and if you get stroppy and don't answer questions, you're in for three-hour screening tests. Then more questions. The basis of it is harassment really because every young person has been lifted half a dozen times since the Army's been in, and they ask the same questions each time. We live in a mixed area just outside the Creggan estate. We've been raided at least fifty times in the two years previous to the IRA truce: at least once every two weeks. It got to the stage where, if there wasn't a raid in two weeks, even three weeks, we thought something was wrong. There was never anything found in our house. Most of the times they've been down, they've arrested at least three members, if not all the family, excluding my mother and the two youngest children (eleven and seven years). My brother, who's an ice-cream salesman, is continually harassed by the Army. It's an everyday occurrence for him. They take the stuff out of his van and leave it lying in the summer sun. He's been beaten up numerous times by the Army.

*Were you there on Bloody Sunday?*

I was at the front of the march, fairly near the bandstand, when Bernadette was speaking and the shooting started. There was rubber bullets to begin with, then there was the obvious change of note to lead bullets. People got down to get out of the line of fire as soon as possible. My younger

brother, who was sixteen, was standing at the flats when they came in and him and his three friends took off through the flats at the other side of the street. The Army pulled up into the square and two of his friends were shot dead in front of him. He had to jump over the bodies to get away. He took off after that – he was actually shot at himself. We went down later that night to see the holes where they had shot at him. He ran to get to where we live, up to the Creggan – he ran the whole way. When I got home later he was still in a state of shock. He was sitting there weeping, saying: 'They killed them, the bastards killed them'. We just couldn't get a sensible word out of him. People were shocked that night – anger and shock, getting more shocked as the anger wore off. Bloody Sunday was in a way one of the recruiting campaigns the IRA had. When people realised the extremes that the British Army would go to to stop them marching on their own streets, they realised the gun was the only way. The figure ran into a few hundreds of the people who walked to the Creggan that night to apply for membership.

### IN BELFAST

*Can you tell us about the day that internment was introduced?*

The morning internment was introduced came as no surprise to us. We were staffing the relief centre round the clock and we had nine homeless families to look after. We watched hundreds of soldiers, their faces blackened, and convoys of saracens and ten-ton trucks furtively invade Ardoyne. We knew something sinister was afoot, and our guess was correct – internment was with us. At four they pounced and hell was let loose. All around us we could hear doors and windows being smashed in. The district was wakened by the screams of women as they watched while their fathers, sons and brothers – aged between fifteen and seventeen – were dragged and brutally beaten from their homes. Some of them in nothing more than underwear and trousers. In most cases they were barefoot and were forced to run through the streets for the waiting trucks – most of the streets were covered in broken glass and rubble from rioting. The men were herded into trucks, worse than any animal, and made to lie face down on the floor, sometimes two or three deep. We were not to find their whereabouts until about three days later. Ardoyne was left minus two

\*Set up in '69 to help homeless families

hundred men and boys. Most of the men who were lifted were wage-earners and fathers, their families were immediately brought down to a minimum income. As political prisoners, they refused to accept prison food or prison garb, so the families have to supply them with food parcels and clothing. Food parcels cost about eight to ten pounds a week. The men accept the cheapest clothes to try to alleviate the burden on their families. The Green Cross and the Prisoners' Defence Fund were organisations formed to raise money, door to door collections, functions, raffles, selling second-hand clothes. We were soon able to pay £3 to a single man's family and £5 to married men's families. Men from ninety families were interned.

*What do the Army do when they search your house?*

The first time I was searched was in '71. The street was sealed off at top and bottom and nobody allowed out of their house. This was at half one in the morning, till they finished doing the house-to-house search at half-eight. So people were automatically out of bed at half-one, waiting for the soldiers to come up to their house. You couldn't fall asleep just waiting for the soldiers to rap your window you were too tense. Whenever they came in, two went upstairs, one stood at the bottom of the stairs, two came into the kitchen two into the scullery, four into the garden and

## RESISTANCE: INTRODUCTION

The Army occupation, with its increasing repression, hasn't succeeded in smashing the Catholic people. The resistance has grown stronger. Central to resistance is the armed struggle, but behind it is the community. The armed struggle protects the community: the community protects the armed struggle. No guerilla organisation can exist without widespread support in the areas where it operates - doors left open, houses where people on the run and arms can be hidden, people who turn a blind eye when they see more than they should, people to warn of Army attacks, do first aid, and so on. The strength of the Catholic working class comes both from the armed struggle and from community organisation. In Ireland we can see clearly how working class power can be exercised outside the factory. One example is the abolition of Stormont in 1972, which came about in the face of massive community mobilisation around street demonstrations, rioting, total rent and rate, electricity, gas, TV bill, etc., strikes. In the Catholic no-go areas the community effectively governed itself. The struggle has changed the community; changed personal and family relationships, and changed attitudes.

As in all situations of struggle, the involvement of women and children is vital, and their power and role changes. From their involvement in the struggle, women gain strength to challenge their subordinate role in the home. Women's part in the struggle has moved from the more passive one of support - meals for the boys on the run, or banging bin-lids to warn against attack - to full involvement in the military struggle. At the same time, much of the resistance in the community is sustained mainly by the women. This is partly because the British Army has discriminated against women - men are far more likely to be arrested than women if they go on protest marches, and for a long time it was easier for a woman to carry arms past check-points. As women have become central to the struggle, they've realised they can 'think for themselves', and have increasingly questioned the attitude of the Catholic Church to family relationships, divorce and sexual morality. As women have spent more time out of the home, they have had less time for housework.

One of the forms of community action in which women have been central is the rent and rate strikes; it was usually the women who took the decision as to whether or not the family should go on strike. The strike was a protest against internment. At its height, about ninety percent of Catholics were on strike, and by September '71 the Stormont government had already lost two million in revenue. Although the SDLP claimed credit for calling the strike, and gained hatred for calling it off two and a half years later, the strike after internment only organised and made public a refusal to pay rent that was already widespread. The strike once more

four into the yard. The children were in bed sleeping. They told me to go up and waken the children and bring them downstairs. The soldiers searched upstairs and downstairs; they took about an hour and a half. They lifted the floorboards in the back bedroom. I was one of the lucky ones for I got my floorboards nailed down again. Some of the people, not only did they lift the floorboards, but they knocked a hole through the ceiling to see into the kitchen to make sure there was no false ceiling. Whenever I went to put the three children to bed, the drawers of the dressing table were emptied on the floor; the bedclothes were on the floor. Now, how did they expect a three-year-old, a four-year-old and an eight-year-old to get into bed when it was all upside down? I had to go straight downstairs again to make sure they didn't take anything valuable (not that I had anything much that was valuable - I only had a ring, worth about £2). They'd taken money off an old woman which we had tried to get back, but they denied taking it. And I was afraid also that they might plant something in my house; that they had been known to do. They didn't plant anything that time, but another time, when they searched the house, my good friend L. searched my house systematically afterwards and, between two soup plates in the scullery, she found a bullet which was definitely not there beforehand.

brought the whole Catholic community into conflict with the state, showing the strong support for the armed struggle. The state hasn't taken this threat lying down. It has tried to use the welfare state to smash working class struggle. For example, the Bad Debt Act of 1971 entitled Stormont to withhold all or part of *any* social security payments (dole, pensions, etc.) from people who owed money to the state. Family allowances too have been chopped if the mother is on rent and rate strike.

Community organisation is vital in defending the community against sectarian attack. Since 1969, over forty thousand Catholics have been driven from their homes; intimidated or burnt out. At first, they were taken in by other people, but soon relief committees were set up to rehouse people, look after intimidated families and give help after people are arrested. The vital importance of this sort of community organisation showed itself during the Ulster Workers' Council stoppage of May '74. The totally reactionary strike of Protestant workers in crucial industries showed the vulnerability of the Catholic ghettos and forewarned of the situation in a civil war. Relief committees co-ordinated food, medical supplies and transport. An understanding of how the UWC stoppage hit the Catholic areas shows the reactionary nature of this strike. We totally reject the analysis that sees the UWC strike as progressive on the supposed grounds that it was an expression of Protestant working class power. Although the strike disrupted British imperialism's plans in Ireland, it in no way challenged the *existence* of imperialism in Ireland, and it called for intensified oppression of the Catholic working class.

In this section we talk to C in Derry, S and I in the Ardoyne and T from the Ardoyne relief committee.

## DERRY

*How has the armed struggle changed from defence of the areas to a more offensive role?*

C - The need for that shift became clear. This started with attacks on the British army outside the area and then moved on with the bombing campaign. There have been no civilians killed in Derry from bombs - there has always been at least half an hour's warning. The campaign has been aimed at the main shopping area, which is predominantly owned by middle class Protestants. The shopping centre has twice been razed to the ground and built up at least twice. There's also been bank-raids. The British press has tried a smear campaign on the IRA, saying their bombing campaign has been aimed at the civilians. This can be refuted just by looking at the figures from Derry. The only Derry people killed by bombs are IRA volunteers in accidents.

The Provisionals have been clearly seen as the only people



prepared to defend the people of Derry from attacks by British imperialism and Protestant gangs. Every time there have been murders by the British Army, there have been lots of people wanting to join the IRA. Support has been very, very strong and is still. The actual numbers in the IRA are nothing to go by – it's the support in the community that counts.

## BELFAST

*Have the troubles brought people closer together?*

I – There's always been neighbourliness, but there never was the closeness before that there is now. You see, most of us have the same attitude – I could be talking to her today and in the morning someone would come round and say B was shot – this is something you live with. Like us a few years ago. We were bringing in the New Year quite happy, and someone said, 'Goodness, this time last year my brother was with me', and I said, 'Ay, this time last year T [my husband] was here'. There was eight of us in the group and everybody had lost somebody during the troubles. And it suddenly struck us – we were crying and all the club was crying with us. And the next day we laughed at it, but at the time it was sorrowful – to think that everybody had lost somebody and we didn't know who was next to go. This makes a bond between people, and this year we were all in the club and we all looked at each other – it shows in the face, you know – and we wondered, will it be the same crowd next year, will one of us be missing?

*How have women been involved in the struggle? How has their involvement changed their role in the family?*

S – In '69 and '70 it was women who went round collecting for petrol bombs, not the men. The women would have surprised you. One woman, a daily churchgoer, comes to my door: 'Would you mind coming round the doors with me? We're, er . . . we're going to collect for petrol bombs for the kids'. And I says, 'Well, what does your husband think about it? I'm alright, I've got no husband to send out, is your's sent out?' And she turns and says, 'I've told my husband he's got to *make* the petrol bombs'. She did, that's the truth! And I says, 'Well, what does he think about it?' 'He's got to do it and that's just it, never mind what he thinks, I'm telling him he's got to do it'. Now I'd never

heard this woman give an order *once* to her husband. A neighbour of mine – I was very surprised.

In early '70, five men in Ardoyne were brought up on a murder charge. The evidence was pegged high against them. Everybody knew they were innocent – the police, the Army knew they were innocent. We started a Women's Action Committee. This was the best thing that ever happened to us. We sat in the middle of the town and completely stopped the traffic – this had never been done by women in fifty-two years. It was done by four or five hundred women on a Saturday. The police tried to shift us. Then they came in riot gear. We all had big placards and the police were trying to get them off us. There was this woman – she's only four foot ten but she's really game. She broke a window in one of the biggest department stores in town and took out this electric kettle and swung it round and round with the flex till it was right by this policeman's head, and she let the poor bastard have it. We done pickets on police stations and at the court every week for six months. We got so much support that at the trial they dropped the charges. The men were set free. These fellas had to be smuggled out of court because there were six or seven hundred Loyalists waiting to have a go at them. On the last day the court was crowded with women. And crowds of Loyalist women were waiting to have a go at us when we came out. We had to rush out and the men from our district had brought down furniture vans and mini-buses and anything that would carry people. We managed to get out. It was a real triumph. Women had to find time to do it – they just left the dishes unwashed. They thought it was more important to go-out on demos.

I – Whenever there's a protest to go on the men can't go out because they'll be photographed. The Army doesn't have to charge out and arrest them, all they have to do is sit in the barracks and photograph them, then lift them when they search the houses. It's the women that go out to protest. And they – er – like a protest. It's no good saying they don't. Whenever there's a protest they don't go out in dribs and drabs they go out in hundreds. Many's the time the soldiers have fired CS gas and rubber bullets at women. And this makes the women more determined.

Before the troubles, you'd never see women in the clubs. But that's all changed now. They go and they are indepen-



dent. They had to become independent. The men were getting shot and interned and the women had to cope with the problems at home and support the men in jail. They had to make their own decisions. Before they had just silently suffered. Now the women are always discussing politics — they would never have done this before '68.

Before the troubles my attitude was a wife — doormat. It makes me sick to think of it, quite honestly. How stupid, how many years I wasted — it's incredible — and, by God, I'll never go back to being a doormat again. There'll be a lot of broken marriages after this, unfortunately, but it's a good thing. For the women whose husbands are inside, they're like myself only younger, well some of them only have two children. Well, they're not going to lumber themselves with five or six children just because their husbands are out; they're going to make sure they can lead as free a life as possible, and as equal as possible to a man, for this is their way of thinking. You can't just turn the clock back. Women have learned through these troubles that they can reason for themselves, they'll never turn round now and say, 'He's a man, he's able to think better than me because he's a man.' I personally could never see any of the women we know in the district, whenever their husbands get out, scrubbing the floors. What they'll never be able to do now is push women back into the home.

*Has women questioning their role in the family led to a lessening of the influence of the Catholic Church?*

S — An awful lot. It's like kissing a bishop's ring, you know, all you can see is the glitter of the ring, and you know who's wearing it — a bishop. But nowadays, if a woman were to kiss a bishop's ring, she'd say: 'I wouldn't mind one like that', and she probably wouldn't have thought of anything like that years ago. People have progressed in their ideas about themselves and about their church, and it is the women who have brought forward these ideas as far as the church is concerned I think.

In the old days you couldn't say a word against the church, either in the North or the South. Nowadays, the Provos will discuss the question; they'll contradict things the church has said, where old Republicans would never have done. This happened a time ago — a Directive of the Bishop went out and the priests at all masses said that the people who opened the door to 'these terrorists' were as much terrorists as the men doing the shootings and bombings. 'If you didn't open your doors there'd be no terrorists in the Ardoyne'. And you know what happened? People got up and walked out of church in the middle of mass. And this wasn't just one parish, it was every parish. If six years ago people had told you that this would happen, that people would walk out on a priest . . . We know that a hell of a lot of priests are using the pulpit as a political platform — this should *not* be so. Everybody agreed that the priest wasn't there to preach politics.

*You've told us about the children rioting to defend the area, how else have they been involved?*

I — The children are fantastic. When the young boys and girls see anyone getting arrested, they are the ones who let the adults know that someone is being lifted. As soon as the soldiers stop a couple of fellas even just to question them, the youngsters will start shouting and you'll find one or two who run to the nearest house and say, 'Missus, they're holding the fella there, they're going to arrest him', and the woman will say, 'Who?', and they said, 'That wee lad at the corner there', or 'That man at the corner'. The woman will go out and tap her next door neighbour's window and say, 'They've got so-and-so at the corner', and before you know where you are, it ends up with twenty or thirty people after five minutes, as well as fifty or sixty children, around six soldiers, with their backs to you, and they keep on turning round and pointing their guns to make sure that you don't get too close.

The relationship between parents and children — um — well, I don't think there are any children in the Ardoyne. The children are actually adults and the parents have given them their place as having sense. They don't want to run to their mummy to hide; the children run to their mummy to pull

her out onto the street. And the mothers wouldn't dream of letting their children down.

*Can you tell us some ways that the community has organised itself during the struggle?*

S — Out of necessity in these troubles, every area has had to get organised and bind itself together. One way the community has organised is the rent and rate strike. This began with the day of internment, the 9th of August 1971. About two days later the SDLP — John Hume and Gerry Fitt — advocated that the people of the minority areas go on rent and rate strike. That is, people living in council houses to go on rent strikes and also people that owned their own houses to withhold their rates and not pay their gas or electricity, as this would cripple the government and force them to release internees. The people did this very, very willingly, as they were a hundred percent against internment. Two years after this, the same SDLP, once they got power, turned round and advocated that people that had not paid their rent and rates should have the money stopped out of their social security. And this goes on today — people have their family allowance books called in and this family allowance and three to five pounds of their SS is kept from them until their arrears are paid.



Before the rent and rate strike, the rent collector tried coming in a couple of times. He got two streets collected and he went out as empty as he came in and that was that. The SDLP wouldn't put it that there was a strike on already, they would turn round and say that the men were hijacked and their money took off them — well that's lies . . . And the same with the Gas Board. The Gas Board got fed up losing their vans, losing their shillings out of the meters. They haven't tried switching off the gas, they don't dare. If one of their vans came into the area to switch off the gas, they'd be run out of the area to this day.

*When did the relief centre start in the Ardoyne? Has it suffered much harassment from the British Army?*

T – In August '69 we had approximately fifty families burnt out. They were completely homeless. We had to find accommodation and the only suitable place was the school. There was a lot of trouble in the area at the time; two men had already been shot dead. The school lay in direct line of fire from the other side of the Crumlin Road. We had to be very furtive getting the families to the school. The Army don't harass the relief centre much now, we used to have them in daily. At one time we had the furniture of ten families in the relief centre. They came in one night and wrecked all the furniture. When we complained they said they'd found ammunition. We asked them to prove it and they said they'd found an old shot-gun. This shot-gun could have been anybody's from years ago – this was just an excuse. Not only did they wreck the furniture, they deliberately scattered all small personal mementoes – things of sentimental value – all over. Because of the excuse about the shot-gun they gave no compensation. Those families had been forced out of their own homes and then this happened to them.

*How did you organise during the UWC stoppage?*

T – The strike was brought in to wreck the Executive. I don't think the Loyalists realised the consequences for their own people. They tried to wreck the minority districts by cutting off all public services (gas, electricity, etc.), but it did as much harm to them as to us. We were in the position where we had no wholesalers or large suppliers in the area. We had to go as far as the South to collect petrol or food for babies. We had to run UDA roadblocks. We were running trips day and night. We were fortunate to have a number of social clubs in the district who, when we called them together to point out the plight of the district, they all chipped in immediately and gave about two thousand pounds and promised to empty their coffers if the money was needed. Fortunately the strike only lasted a couple of weeks. We had queues till three a.m. supplying bread to the district; milk when we could get it. We brought in turf, coal for the OAPs; we had open fires going at the corner of the streets to save coal for cooking. We proved we were capable of



1916: the Easter rising in Dublin.  
1969: the rising in the North.

overcoming the problems. We were much more organised than their own people. We came together as a community during that period – apathy had been setting in and the propaganda had created dissension. We realised then that there was a great community feeling in the district. It really raised the morale of the people that they could organise the area themselves. In an emergency, hundreds of people come to the relief centre to see what needs to be done. The committee keeps things going on a day to day basis in between times. If we need help we only have to call.

## THE CURRENT SITUATION – JULY '75

The situation in Ireland is growing increasingly serious. The number of sectarian murders is rising – in recent months there have been fifty or more sectarian killings. The Loyalist majority in the Constitutional Convention means that, if the British accept the conclusions of the Convention for how Ulster should be run, it can only lead to a pro-Loyalist solution. The Loyalist paramilitary organisations – with the exception to date of the UVF – have formed a Joint Ulster Army Council. At the same time the Loyalist politicians have plans for a Loyalist Provisional Government in Ulster to take power if the Convention does not give them what they want. There are clear indications that pogroms and full scale civil war are likely over the next few months.

The British government is looking for a solution guaranteeing the safety of their financial interests in Ireland. At the moment Britain seems to be backing a Loyalist takeover, and making preparations for it. The new amendment to the Emergency Provisions Act will help the Army to smash support for the IRA in the Catholic communities. For example, the Army will have greater legal backing for searches, questioning and arrests. At the same time, resistance and support in Britain may become harder – the government may replace the Prevention of Terrorism Act with permanent measures.

The government is also using sectarian murders for its own ends. There has been a persistent attempt to obscure those responsible. Rees has recently claimed that sectarian murders are carried out by small fringe groups and not by the major paramilitary organisations. The UVF thinks differently – in a recent statement they claimed 'only' to kill known republicans, whose status has been confirmed by information passed on by the security forces. Meanwhile, it

seems that the Protestant Action Force, who are responsible for many of the recent killings, are linked to the UVF. And the British government has just announced its latest plans to use the sectarian divide to repress Catholics. After the success of the Catholic working class in keeping the RUC from returning to the Catholic ghettos, the British government is trying to use new squads – supposedly specially designed to prevent sectarian murders – to reintroduce police into Catholic areas. Sectarian murders are a product of the enforced division in the working class fostered by the Northern state, and Britain – as it always has done – plays on this division.

For Britain, the truce is part of a new, last ditch attempt to find a solution that suits Britain's interests. Since the UWC strike, a solution involving power-sharing, or an 'all-Irish dimension' is off the cards. Instead, the hunt is for an 'acceptable' Loyalist takeover – a takeover that would be agreed to by the Parliamentary Labour Party and the Southern bourgeoisie, and that the Catholic population – hopefully, war-weary – could be forced into accepting. For the Catholic working class, the truce is a breathing space, a chance to recoup, recover and reorganise before full-scale fighting starts again. The strength of Republican forces North and South can be gauged from the thirty thousand people at Wolfe Tone's commemoration in Bodinstown in June – this was the largest protest for a long time.

In this section we talk to people in Belfast and Derry about the current situation.

*How has the truce operated?*

It's an attempt to cool the situation. Some regiments have been deliberately carrying out a knife-edge policy – going as far as they can and then retreating. At first it was touch



Farrington Gardens, burnt out by the Loyalists in 1971. The same could happen in 1975 if the Loyalists have their way.

and go. If the Truce Incident Centres (TICs) hadn't been operating, the truce wouldn't have lasted long. Only two days after the ceasefire was called, two high-ranking Republicans were stopped, asked for IDs, refused to give it and were held for forty-eight hours with no reason given. The whole thing nearly crumbled then, and despite repeated requests through the TIC, nothing was done about it. Eventually it was discovered that the army officer and civil servant concerned opposed the truce and they were then removed.

Since then there have been a lot of policy changes by Westminster. One of their main reasons for wanting the truce was to try and get Sinn Fein to participate in the Convention elections. When Sinn Fein refused, we saw on the ground an immediate different reaction: intense harassment of SF members, even when they were going to spoil their vote. The boycott showed the support for the Republican movement. Since then, again, the officers seem concerned to keep the peace.

*Has there been harassment through the truce?*

**In Derry** – The Army have been keeping a 'low profile', allowing the UDR to take over a lot of their duties. The UDR are actively trying to break the truce. One time they stopped my brother in his van and they told him to get out. He said to them, 'It's the Army's job to search vans and people', and the UDR soldier who was there turned away and turned back immediately, shoving the point of his rifle into my brother's face, cutting him on the nose which needed stitching. He then proceeded to take a case against him for attacking them. There was no reason at all for this. It's only proof of the sectarianism that exists in the UDR and in the police who took the case out against him, and shows that they're out to break the truce because they see that the truce is against their interests.

**In Belfast** – They've continually raided homes. We had a home here – a young chap died and the home was left idle. It had been searched and wrecked a few times while he was living. We had a family very unfortunately made homeless by a fire. We decided to fix up this house. We were in the process of fixing it and the people of the district had started cleaning it out and doing repairs. The Brits walked in and wrecked the house. We were negotiating with the Housing Executive to buy it. They then refused to buy because they couldn't meet the cost of repairing the damage. Quite a few other houses have come in for this treatment during the truce. And I say they are trained for violence and want some sort of release for their training.

*Is there likely to be a civil war?*

**T** – It depends on what you call a civil war. If you look at the situation now – the guns are trained on the district; there are sixty dead; homes are burnt out. The total deaths in Northern Ireland is about fifteen hundred, all in a period of five years, and all violent deaths, in the period you might call civil war. Normally a civil war is when an organisation of the people want to overthrow the government. But it's the reverse – the people who want to maintain the government want to start civil war. The RUC, the UDR, the paramilitary groups, are playing loyal to the Crown and to Ulster – these are the people who threaten the civil war. But we've already had civil war for the past five years. We've had the power and weight of the British Army, the RUC, the UDR, etc., against us.

**S** – It's quite possible there will be a civil war when the Convention collapses. Militarily, the situation is that the IRA have fought a holding campaign with the British Army – they have held the British Army which is sixteen thousand strong. During that period the British Army has never been able to quash the Republican movement. In the eventuality of a civil war, the Republican movement can rely on the support of the people. Greater support even than it has at the moment, and let's be in no doubt about it, if it hadn't been for the support of the people over the past five years, the Republican campaign would never have lasted. It needed the people, both financially and physically – houses for refuge, houses for billets, to give food to men on the run. At the moment I consider it *is* a civil war situation.

The police reserve is a hundred percent Protestant. Most of them are dyed in the wool B-Specials who have a lasting hatred of Catholics. The RUC is ninety percent Protestant. About five percent are genuine policemen in that they don't want to have anything to do with it. You combine these forces together (six thousand RUC, four and a half thousand Police Reserve, four and a half thousand UDR) and they still do not make up the size of the British Army. The British Army plus all these forces cannot do more than hold the IRA and cannot make any genuine gains against the IRA. Certainly the IRA will be in a better position if the troops pull out – it will have control of its own areas. At present it has an enemy in the front (the Loyalists) and an enemy in the rear (the British Army). It would be delighted to get rid of the enemy in the rear.

**I** – If this Convention fails, I honestly believe there will be a civil war because the Loyalists – let's call them the Unionists: give them a nice name! – if they get their way, we will not accept their policy. Because this was the first thing we fought against and we're not going to give in just now, just to hand back to the Loyalists after so many lives have been lost.