



Ireland's Intractable Crisis

Exclusive Interviews with UDA and Provisional

INTERVIEW WITH THE UDA

The Ulster Defence Association (UDA) is by far the largest Loyalist paramilitary body in Northern Ireland. Its membership is mainly working class, and both MPs and clergymen are excluded from the organisation. The UDA was the main force behind the Ulster Workers Stoppage which wrecked the Sunningdale Agreement in 1974 and destroyed the power-sharing executive set up by Britain. In recent years its leaders have become increasingly political in orientation and the UDA is now contesting elections under the name Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party. In 1979 the organisation produced a programme entitled *Beyond the Religious Divide*, calling for an independent Northern Ireland in which the civil liberties of all citizens would be guaranteed by a Bill of Rights. Despite its shift towards conventional politics, the UDA still maintains a clandestine force, the Ulster Freedom Fighters, who admit responsibility for a number of recent killings in the province and for the attack which seriously wounded Bernadette McAliskey.

In the following interview **ANDY TYRIE** and **JOHN McMICHAEL** from the UDA explain to **Bob Rowthorn** their view of the situation in Northern Ireland. Andy Tyrie is Chairman of the UDA and John McMichael is Chairman of its political wing, the Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party.

Would you like to start by saying something about your organisation, how it came into being?

JM: The Ulster Defence Association grew up out of small Protestant vigilante groups. As the IRA campaign mounted after 1969, people living in houses and housing estates would band together maybe five or six men, and they'd go out and patrol the streets after dark. Now they weren't armed, they may have carried a stick, or a walking stick, but they weren't armed with guns. It was more through frustration than anything that they did this because physically they were able to do very little against an IRA attack team. Later these organisations became bigger and the people who lived in one street in a vigilante group got together with a vigilante group from another street, then the whole estate, then a group of estates. Then eventually in 1971 these different areas such as the East Belfast Defence Association, the Lisburn Defence Association, the Shank-

hill Defence Association, the Woodvale Defence Association, the Comber Defence Association all came together and formed the Ulster Defence Association.

The campaign of violence from the IRA was continually increasing and it became more and more apparent that the security policy being enforced by Stormont parliament and the Westminster government was completely ineffective. There didn't seem to be any will to defeat the Provos. So the Protestants copied the Provisional IRA and we became involved in very deep sectarian violence which lasted for a number of years. In 1972 almost 500 people were killed, and we have little doubt now that most of those people died, whether they were Protestant or Catholic, because they were of the wrong religion in the wrong place at the wrong time. Such was the deep sectarian division and fear within Northern Ireland. Since then we have tried to move away from sectarian violence and we believe we have been successful. Since 1977 we have emphasised more and more within the UDA that we should seek a political solution. We have formed now our own political party, the Ulster Loyalist Democratic Party, and we now accept that there can be no military solution in Northern Ireland. There must be a political solution, there must be political dialogue. And there must be a state brought about and created within the bounds of what is now Northern Ireland, the Six Counties, which can attract a common allegiance of both Protestant and Catholic. And this is the point we're at at the moment.

The Ulster Defence Association was the organisation that ran the Ulster workers stoppage in 1974, wasn't it?

JM: That's correct. The Ulster Defence Association was the backbone of the 1974 constitutional stoppage against the Sunningdale Agreement. This Agreement set up a power-sharing executive in Northern Ireland. More important there was a clause in the Agreement referring to a Council of Ireland which would be the framework of eventually a united Ireland parliament, one parliament for all Ireland. Powers would gradually be devolved to that parliament. This to Ulster Loyalists was a united Ireland naked, a naked threat of a united Ireland, something which they could not tolerate. The politicians wouldn't do anything about it so the people decided to do it for themselves, and they overthrew for the first time in a long

while, since the days of Oliver Cromwell, the wishes of the Westminster parliament. The politicians in Northern Ireland didn't really want anything to do with the stoppage because most of them believed we couldn't succeed.

AT: The politicians never provide the necessary leadership, because when the crisis does come about they hide and leave it to the people. We provided the soldiers because we thought the politicians would be the officers and they would have the courage of their convictions. In private they gave us this blessing but in public they would not come out and be the officers. So we did all the things that were expected of us and got deeply involved in violence. We are seen as the thugs and the gangsters, the bully boys, but if you have a look deep into the situation you realise who the thugs and the gangsters and the bully boys really are, the only difference is they're still wearing their masks.

In recent years quite a gulf has opened up between you and Ian Paisley.

AT: There's a gulf opened up between us and all politicians because of our own political ideas.

JM: Because our vision of a peaceful Ulster is contrary to the traditional view, namely Unionists and Republicans.

AT: You also have to remember that because we're not controlled by the politicians, they are now trying to create their own paramilitary organisations. They bring them out every six months to scare the life out of the Provos and every time they do it the Provos plant more bombs and shoot more people. If they think parading and marching about the mountains is going to scare the Provos they're living in cuckoo land.

How do you see the question of the Provisionals being solved?

JM: The Provisional IRA is only this generation of a problem that has gone on for 600 years. The Republican and the Irish nationalist movement has been trying generation after generation to remove the British from Ireland. We believe that the whole basis of the Provos'

So the Protestants copied the Provisional IRA and we became involved in very deep sectarian violence

motivation is that they are caught up in this tradition. From their point of view the war is aimed at the British occupational forces. If the British were not part of the Northern Ireland situation the basic motivations of the average Provo, especially the young people, would be removed, would be diffused. Certainly a small number of people in the Provisional IRA movement or the NiLA would be thickly tied up in a sort of left wing worldwide communist movement, but every country of the western world faces such small tireless organisations and it would be no different here.

AT: You also have to understand the conflict here. It's not always been the case of simply the Roman Catholic population wanting to remove the British from Ireland. You find quite a lot of Protestants wanting to remove them also because they victimise us as well. But even with the big parades and the marches and demonstrations we don't believe that the Catholic population supports the Provisional IRA violence. We honestly believe that, from both points of view now, if there was a proper constitutional arrangement here to suit

both communities, you'd find there was an awful lot of Catholics and Protestants here who would find more in common with each other than they do with the British government or even the Dublin government.

Could you explain what you mean by 'a proper constitutional arrangement'?

JM: We're not against Catholic participation in the state and institutions of the state, but we believe there must first of all be an Ulster parliament here which will be for the benefit of all the Ulster people. We have to have a completely new system here which can gain the support and the trust of both communities. The Catholics distrust the British system of government; the Protestants distrust any change in that system, which involves Republicans. So we believe that eventually there must be an independent Ulster which attracts the allegiance of both Ulster Protestants and Ulster Catholics. It will be much simpler to have Ulster Protestants and Ulster Catholics than British Protestants and British Catholics as it's basically broken down now. There is no likelihood that Northern Ireland will be forever peaceful within the UK. There is no likelihood that Northern Ireland will be peaceful if there is any attempt to have a United Ireland. So I believe at the end of the day there must be a negotiated independent Ulster state within the Common Market and as part of the Commonwealth.

The demands of the Provisional IRA seem to be gaining support in the Labour Party. What would happen if Britain decided to pull out, as the Provos demand, and called a conference to discuss the question of withdrawal?

JM: If the British declared that in, say, 1986 or in 1987 they would be withdrawing from Northern Ireland, it would add positive support to the Provisional IRA, who would appear to be the winners. On the Loyalist side, Protestants would be faced with the traditional horror of the thought of our race disappearing into an Irish Gaelic Ireland — Catholic Ireland; we would fear that our race would disappear as it almost has now in the 26 counties. We would adopt the usual traditional siege mentality which we've had since 1641 when 20,000 Protestants were massacred, which is probably the one thing which has moulded our siege mentality — the greatest fear that we have. The Paisleys and the Molyneuxs who seek power on the Loyalist side would play on this fear. The Ulstermen as in 1912 and 1914 would start to arm themselves and march about. In such a situation, suppose the Provos did stand down and the Protestants became more militant, where would that leave the Catholic community? Would they then start to resurrect the defensive nationalist organisations? Would the Provos then become a sort of attacking army of the Catholics? Would there be a stand-off situation? How could you have a conference where everybody's arming themselves?

What you are saying is that the Protestants would be determined to resist and that any idea of a negotiated unification of Ireland is unrealistic?

JM: It would be very unlikely.

The UDA has a policy for an independent Ulster which contains a bill of rights to protect the rights of the Catholic minority. Could you explain this?

JM: There is no majority in Northern Ireland, we're all in the minority. In fact we base our political framework on that fact. We wrote a constitution in our document *Beyond the Religious Divide*

which laid down what we envisaged as the type of state we would like to live in. It would protect our rights and liberties, and we wrote it from a point of view seeking the protection of every *individual* in the state — not of specific minorities. We always fell into the trap of trying to write a constitution aimed at attracting the Catholics.

It doesn't mention Catholics explicitly?

JM: It's for everyone.

We have to take a bigger chance than the Catholics, because if we remove ourselves from the UK then that will be irreversible

Could I ask you some questions about this. There is extremely widespread mistrust amongst Catholics of your programme. They say it sounds very good, but in practice . . .

JM: Roman Catholics fear the setting up of an Orange State for an Orange Ascendancy and Protestants are frightened of independence. From the Protestant point of view we have to take a bigger chance than the Catholics, because if we negotiate the breaking of a link and remove ourselves from the UK that will be irreversible. There's no way that any future British government, after a sigh of relief that the problems were solved, is ever going to welcome back Northern Ireland into the UK. We're going to still be physically on this island. We would depend on the goodwill of the Catholics who would be the majority within the island of Ireland.

To get this project off the ground clearly requires a fair amount of Catholic support.

AT: That's true, yes.

So what do you think are the first steps towards getting that kind of support?

JM: We must have a parliament, representative of the Ulster people — a parliament which strives to bring about social justice. We must create here an Ulster within the United Kingdom at the moment and a parliament which will attract the support of the Ulster people — both Protestant and Catholic — and which will work for the Ulster people — both Protestant and Catholic. With a written constitution we have very little doubt that if such a set-up were put into operation, the Ulster people would turn away from Westminster more and more, and would gradually give their allegiance more and more to their own parliament. The divisiveness of sectarianism within our society would gradually disappear. Under the economic circumstances in which we live, as the Northern Ireland economy gets worse, more and more we will be driven together. If we could remove the immediate constitutional fear, we could work together to build towards a reasonable standard of living within Ulster. I believe that more and more of our people will realise that they've a separate identity from being Irish — and from being British.

Do you see an independent Northern Ireland as basically a capitalist or mixed economy?

JM: We believe in a mixed economy. We believe in private enterprise, we believe in reward for private enterprise, but we also believe in a welfare state and that those who cannot fend for themselves must

be supplied for. We believe in private enterprise but with a social conscience. You have to look after the weak as well as the strong.

Do you think the aim should be to help local private enterprise from Northern Ireland rather than to invite in new multinationals from outside?

JM This is essential. Where we're beaten more than most people is in that we don't have any control over our economy. We don't have any control over our marketing, for the firms which are here. Most of these firms are based outside Northern Ireland and if they feel there should be cutbacks, they usually cut in Northern Ireland first, because we don't have a great political hammer. We must create our own industries.

Would you envisage having quite close economic links with the South?

JM: It's essential that we work closely with the South. Especially in agriculture and tourism, as things which would be of economic benefit to us both. It is essential that we establish an Ulster nation which is on friendly terms with the Irish nation and the British nation and the EEC. We're not talking about an independent Ulster which would be isolationist *a la* Sinn Fein, we're talking about an independent Ulster which would be interdependent with all our good neighbours in Europe.

On the economic front, you'd anticipate presumably a difficult transition period to full independence?

JM: Oh, indeed! We would require an economic subvention for probably in the region of 25 years but we wouldn't envisage any problems there. We feel that Britain would breathe a good sigh of relief at the thought of buying Northern Ireland off out of the UK peaceably. Also we believe that Northern Ireland, if a peaceful solution was brought about, would attract very considerable amounts of initial capital from Europe which would give us the chance to develop our own home industries. We don't want to end up as just a dumping ground for multinationals, but we accept that we would need vast amounts of initial capital to give us a start.

Apart from their long term commitment to a United Ireland, your programme seems to be rather similar to that of Sinn Fein Workers Party. (Official IRA — ed)

JM: Yes. Like us, they're a constitutional party. There are three main options before the Ulster people — constitutional options: to remain part of the UK, join with the South to form a United Ireland, or move towards a negotiated independent Ulster. We accept that none of these three options are really viable — at least politically, socially and peacefully viable — unless they are supported by the vast majority of both communities. Therefore, we accept that an independent Ulster couldn't come about unless it was supported by the vast majority of both communities. The Workers Party accept that a United Ireland couldn't come about unless it was supported by the vast majority of both communities and certainly in that sense we are in total agreement with them — that we must accept the wishes of the majority at any point in time. That makes us a democratic party. Unlike the Provisional Sinn Fein, which refuses to put candidates before the electors and refuses to work towards a united Ireland through democratic means. They're trying to bring a United Ireland about, using gelignite and bombs.

It's clear that the leadership of the UDA has made very big changes in the

way it sees political questions over the past few years. How far is this also true of the rank and file?

JM: The first thing you have to understand is that the UDA is a large organisation. It came together for the defence of the community. Within that organisation there were people of different political views. The only thing that was a common denominator was the fear of being overrun by the forces of Republicanism or the fear of a United Ireland. As we developed our programme for negotiated

British government, for political reasons, is going to declare or accept anything which appears to be political status. We've gone beyond that. But at the same time we must accept that in 1968 there were only 368 prisoners within Northern Ireland. Now there are about 3,000. We believe that most young men who have gone to prison have done so because of the unrest in Northern Ireland.

A T What we're saying is that the bulk of prisoners who we support inside the prison are people who are in the thing because they



independence we took it to our membership. Now we're not saying our membership did somersaults and jumped up and down and said good god Eureka! It was a gradual process. Even now it's a gradual process. They understand most of what we're trying to do. They do accept that the British will not be here forever. They know that they're not Irish. They know that there cannot be a military solution. They know that there must be a political solution. And we have the support of the vast majority of our membership. Certainly they will disagree with us on different things within the broad concept. Our organisation is a para-military organisation, but there is far more democracy within it than people would ever begin to believe.

We are glad the hunger strike's over because it brought about a total polarisation of the community. Our people are just a cross-section of the general Loyalist or Protestant population within Northern Ireland. A crisis like the hunger strike makes all of them think differently. It made some of them more militant, more conservative, more fearful of the Catholic population in general. Well, hopefully that era has now passed, and now we can settle down to the hard work of promoting our ideas. It's not going to be easy.

Talking about the Provisionals, how do you feel about the demand for political prisoner status? You've said publically that you support special category status, haven't you?

AT: Oh yes, yes because our prisoners are in there for special reasons, they're not criminals, in no way are they criminals.

JM: But to pursue a belief when you know at the end of the day that it's not going to get anywhere would be foolish because its contrary to your compassion for the prisoners. We have to accept that no

believed it, or else they got caught up emotionally. They're special prisoners. They must be. There are special courts, special police, there's special every damn thing.

Could you say something about the relationship between the UDA and the Ulster Freedom Fighters, the UFF?

A T: The UFF consists of a group of people who are members or associated members of the Ulster Defence Association and they decided that the only solution to the problem is a purely military one. And their attitude is, well to remove active Republicans, and active nationalists, who are trying to overthrow what exists here in the form of a government. People who are assassinating or bombing Ulster people. The UFF feel they are justified in taking military action against them. Now, if that's the type of action they do stay strictly to, and do bomb and shoot only active Republicans, no way would the UDA disapprove of it. We would have no objection to it whatsoever.

We believe in private enterprise but with a social conscience. You have to look after the weak as well as the strong

Am I right in believing there's now widespread suspicion of Britain amongst the Protestant population in Northern Ireland? Suspicion about British intentions?

A T: We do not trust the British government in any shape or form. And that is not only a fact, that is like a religion here.

JM: Anybody who trusts the British government is either a fool or too young.

A T: Yes. And if you have a look at some of the things they have been responsible for over the years. Like we'll never talk to the Provies, then they fly them out of the country. And we'll not make deals, and they make deals. The British government, we know them.

if they do bomb and shoot only active Republicans, no way would the UDA disapprove of it

Unfortunately the feelings are there but we can't prove all we know about them. But we know rightly what their attitude is, that it's the British government they're thinking about not the Ulster people.

Would you say that the experience of the last twelve years has made a lot of Ulster Protestants feel their future doesn't lie with the United Kingdom? Or at least half feel that?

JM Ask everybody here what their second option is to the Union and independence is never far out of their conscious thought. There's a key here that people must understand. The Ulster Loyalist and this includes a lot of Catholics, are deeply suspicious and resentful of the Westminster politicians, and wouldn't trust your parliament. But are deeply and emotionally and for a long time connected to the monarchy and the crown.

A T: Here's an example of trust in the British government. They had negotiations with the Dublin government and they were that secretive they wouldn't even tell people in their own cabinet what they talked about. And they wouldn't bring any of our local MPs to talks. They had Lord Carrington there and other top civil servants, but Margaret Thatcher didn't see or didn't think that we were mature enough to tell us what she was talking about. And this has been quite often the case. How many people has she talked to regarding the situation here, and how many different cabinet units have made decisions which they thought were best for Ulster without really consulting us?

Does this mean you are calling for some genuine democracy in Northern Ireland?

A T Oh yes... It must be the first thing.

JM: An Ulster parliament for Ulster people. And you're going to have to weigh up the risk. People are saying that if you bring a parliament back here it'll be a civil war. So what's the alternative? If you don't bring it back or if you do bring it back you're going to take a risk. They took the risk to take it away from us. They took it away and look what has happened over the last few years.

The important thing is that the parliament must not be set up either to institutionalise sectarianism as it did in 1974 or to create an artificial parliament, which is not a parliament at all. There must be a political set-up here which is recognised as democratic and that provides equal opportunity for all to be involved. And it must be real. The English and the Irish must encourage the Ulster people through that parliament. Everyone tells us that nobody can solve the problem except the people of Northern Ireland, but no one ever encourages us to do it. Each tries to come up with ideas that they think the Ulster people should fit into, and what they can't understand is that the Ulster people have a mind of their own.

INTERVIEW WITH THE PROVISIONALS

In 1970 the IRA split over the question of whether the immediate aim should be to reform Northern Ireland or destroy it. One faction, the Officials, argued for a stages approach to national unity, in which the existing state of Northern Ireland would first be democratised and then later, only after Protestant consent had been won, would North and South be unified. In 1972 they declared an indefinite ceasefire on the grounds that continued fighting would only alienate Protestants and make it impossible to win their support either for reforms in the North, or for the eventual unification of Ireland. The other faction, the Provisionals, rejected this approach and argued that Northern Ireland must be destroyed. Over the past decade, they have waged a prolonged military campaign designed to unify Ireland by force. Until recently, the Provisionals were in difficulties and their campaign was stagnating. However, they were greatly strengthened by the hunger strike earlier this year which won them considerable support, both internationally and amongst Irish Catholics. Although outlawed, the Provisionals maintain a legal political wing, known as Provisional Sinn Fein, which contests elections and conducts propaganda on their behalf.

In the following interview, **DANNY MORRISON**, editor of the Provisionals' weekly newspaper *An Poblacht*, explains to **Bob Rowthorn** his view of the situation in Northern Ireland. This interview was conducted just before the current IRA bombing campaign in Britain commenced.

What are the long term objectives of your organisation?

We believe in the 1916 Proclamation of Independence. We draw all our recent philosophy from that document, which was a socialist document, and it promised the wealth of Ireland for the people of Ireland. And it stood for Irish unity. We see partition as an obstacle in the struggle for the setting up of a democratic socialist republic. You can't have a socialist republic with partition as it exists now because of the way it divides the Irish people. So we see the major struggle as being to overthrow partition, to end partition, and that's why we support the armed struggle against British imperialism in the North of Ireland.

How do you see the role of Protestant workers in all this?

Well, first of all you need to trace the history of the Protestant people in Ireland which has to a large extent determined their political outlook. Although they were brought here as settlers by the British, Protestants played a big part in the uprising of the United Irishmen in 1798. And the founder of Irish Republicanism was a Protestant called Wolfe Tone. At that time, although the majority of Protestants still supported the Brits, large numbers of them were Republican and were dedicated to a liberal tradition. But after the Act of Union in 1820, the ordinary Protestant peasants and townfolk in the North were bought off by the British and became a sort of aristocracy of labour there. They were bought off with marginal privileges over their fellow Catholics. Their fellow Catholics were consigned to the poorest jobs, into insecurity. Inequalities were as broad on both sides except for the fact that the Protestants had jobs to go to, however badly paid they were. And of course you had the Orange Order which was set up to counter the United Irishmen and its internationalist message. The Orange Order fostered a religious division in Ireland. And as a result the people were always polarised along religious lines. And this had a direct effect on the political conscious-

ness of the Protestant people. After partition in 1921, the ordinary Protestant working class interest in the North was tied in with that of the state and that of the Union with Britain. And that has remained so to this day. Apart from a short period in the unemployment

What do you think of the argument that, before national unity can be established, the North must be reformed and the present gulf between Catholic and Protestant workers overcome?

People have wasted 50 years of their lives trying to establish a socialist republic by first of all reforming the North. This is the line of the people who broke away from our group in 1969, and who have now just gone into political oblivion. (Morrison is referring to the Official IRA — *ed*). They think, and they're wrong, that you can create a socialist movement in the North, and a socialist movement in the South, and then the two socialist movements will coalesce. It's an impossibility because of the way that partition has dictated the political values of either community in the North. And that's why we believe that only through breaking the Union with Britain, and breaking the back of British imperialism in Ireland will the Protestant section of the working class eventually come round to a different point of view.

How would you evaluate developments within the Protestant paramilitaries? For example they are now admitting that Catholics have had a bad deal in Northern Ireland. And the UDA even talks about the need to break from Britain and set up an independent Northern Ireland.

I welcome any increase in independence of thought of Protestant workers from their bosses in the old aristocratic Unionist party. The thinking behind an independent Six Counties (ie, the present Northern Ireland — *Ed*) is not based on progressive thinking. The Loyalists have become disillusioned with British rule, number one because they saw Britain in April 1972 suspend their holy parliament at Stormont — the Protestant parliament for the Protestant people. They also saw the British government, through force of pressure from the IRA, have to talk to the IRA, and this was heresy and anathema to them.

Then in February 1973, because loyalists were really retaliating against the Catholic people and sectarian assassinations were very high, the first Protestant ever was actually interned in the North of Ireland. You have the Protestants from the UVF and the UDA interned in Long Kesh. And this wasn't cricket for them. So out of that began a thinking, well, 'I'm in here fighting for the Queen and yet the Queen has me in jail. The Brits have started to put us in jail because we are fighting the Catholic community and trying to curtail the IRA, so there's something wrong, so we'll have to find our own identity and what is our own identity?'. That was the momentum behind the idea of an independent Six Counties. And even some of them, although this isn't too widespread, some of them even turned round and said, 'if we get an independent Six Counties we'll attempt to lure the Catholics in by promising them power-sharing'. But there's no way that they'll accept power-sharing, they won't accept power-sharing even under the optimum conditions of a continued Union with Britain. So they'd hardly accept power-sharing with Catholics if they were able to achieve an independent Six Counties.

From my point of view, from 1921 until 1972, the Loyalists had an independent Six Counties. They had their own parliament which legislated independently of Britain, they had their own exchequer, the whole economy was separate from Britain apart from the link with sterling. They had their own independent Six Counties for fifty years and our experience of those fifty years wasn't very happy.

our experience of an independent Six Counties isn't a very happy one, and we would be opposed to it

There was internment in every decade for Nationalists that resisted the Loyalist rule in the North. Nationalist people suffered very high unemployment rates. Nationalist people were forced to live in ghettos, or were forced to emigrate. And so our experience of an independent Six Counties isn't a very happy one, and we would be opposed to it, absolutely opposed to an independent Six Counties.

Don't you think there are some Protestant workers who accept the need for an accommodation with the Catholics? Even many of the Protestant para-militaries have called for a new relationship between Catholics and Protestants.

Right, but the problem is that they continue to shoot ordinary Catholics. And whilst there is a degree of duplicity as well, I recognise there's a big degree of confusion in their thinking. On the one hand they recognise that they have to do something to accommodate the Catholic people because the Catholics have had a rough time and whilst they're very late in the day recognising that, it's to be welcomed. But at the same time, they continue with the sectarian campaign which does nothing to ingratiate Nationalist people towards them or towards their thinking. We have a historical per-



spective of the Loyalist people in the North, the Protestant people, and as long as they are tied to the philosophy of Loyalism, any progressive thinking will always be subverted, it will always reach a dead end or it will turn back on itself and produce vicious sectarian violence. And, if they look upon the independent Six Counties genuinely as a progressive move, well then why don't they go further, why don't they help us root out the capitalist thinking in Ireland, help us set up a socialist republic. If they look into history, look into their own history, they will find that there were very many extremely progressive people from within their own ranks, who gave us our Republicanism. It was the Protestants who gave us our Republicanism. We want to join with them but they have to try and be a bit more empathetic towards the Catholic people, the history of the Nationalist people in Ireland and why we think the way we do. They haven't got, to my knowledge anyway — and I have spoken to Loyalist paramilitaries — a philosophy or rational understanding of the Nationalist people in Ireland.

Can I now ask you a question about your own movement? In the past there was always a strong secular tendency within the Republican movement, and even as late as the 1930s there was a certain measure of Protestant support in Northern Ireland for the Republican cause. But in recent years this has changed, and Republicanism now attracts virtually

no support from Protestants in the North. Although many active Republicans are atheist by conviction...

That's right.

... they are drawn almost exclusively from the Catholic community. What do you think is the significance of this development. What problems does it create for you?

The IRA's position is to break the back of British rule in Ireland, demoralise the will of the British to stay in Ireland

The Republican movement does not defend Catholic theological interests. The Republican movement is a secular organisation. If the majority of its members come from a Catholic background, that's just too bad, that's an historical feature of the way Republicanism developed, the way the Six Counties developed. It's a product not just of August 1969, it's something going back to partition. As I've pointed out to you, Republicanism was founded by Protestants in Ireland, independent of Britain, to defend their own capitalist interests. They were persecuted by the Brits and persecuted by the Church of Ireland, the established church in Ireland. They moved towards a more radical position of universal suffrage and the rights of man, and our movement developed from that, from all that early radical thinking. There are still Protestants in the Republican movement today, but it's only a feature, it has got nothing to do with our thinking. It doesn't cloud our thinking because the Republican movement and the Catholic church are at loggerheads over their analysis of the way forward. We disagree with the special place that the Catholic church has in the present 26 county state. We believe in the separation of church from state.

Can I ask you about abortion and church schools? What would be the position of your organisation on these questions within a United Ireland?

The church's involvement in Catholic schools which are independent of the state-run schools has been politically important to us. However much we may be antagonistic to the Catholic church, the fact of the matter is that being in Catholic schools did maintain and keep alive Nationalist thinking here in the North. This thinking would have been completely undermined if the Catholic church hadn't insisted that they had their own schools in the 1920s. If Catholics had gone into the state schools we would probably all be Unionist by now. We would probably also still have been discriminated against. But we wouldn't have had the independence of thinking and the sort of philosophical background which has given us the energy to struggle against British imperialism and to bring down Loyalist rule in the North. I personally believe there should be no church schools, but I can understand parents wanting their children to be instructed in whatever religious persuasion they are, and I support their right to that.

And the question of abortion?

Personally speaking, I am against abortion on moral grounds, I don't have to go any further on that. Our movement understands and sympathises with women who have abortions or who feel they have to have abortions. The South of Ireland at present does not cater for women who want to have an abortion. But it is a difficult question, one which we have not come to terms with politically. I don't know what the position would be, I would find it personally very hard to

legislate or to finance abortion if I was in government.

If Britain announced a very rapid timetable for the reunification of Ireland and said that by a certain date 'we'll be out and Ireland will be reunified', do you think there would be significant Protestant resistance to that?

Well, yes there would, because the Protestants would want to be blackmailing the British government into staying, or they would probably want to redivide the Six Counties along lines most favourable to themselves. And the way they would blackmail the British government would be through sectarian killings, by attacking the Catholic people. But whenever people say that there would be a bloodbath, they should analyse who's going to cause the bloodbath. The IRA is not going to invade the Shankhill or Sandy Row. The IRA's position is to break the back of British rule in Ireland, demoralise the will of the British to stay in Ireland and to force the British into getting out of Ireland. When that is done there should be a democratic solution to the Irish question.

But the Irish people should be allowed to choose their own government by democratic means, and provided the Republican movement was allowed to engage in that process, and wasn't harassed, and wasn't placed at an unfair disadvantage, we would respect the will of the people. If the Republicans were harassed and persecuted in the course of such a withdrawal and weren't given the same rights as everybody else, then Republicans would reserve the right to resort to force. So what we are saying is this. If the British withdraw, whether or not there is a bloodbath depends on the scenario of that withdrawal. They have to resolve the question of how they are going to withdraw and allow the Irish people as a whole to determine their own future. They have to resolve the problem of what to do with the

**IRELAND AND
THE IRISH
QUESTION**


Karl Marx and Frederick Engels

Marx's and Engels's interest in Ireland was life-long and reflected throughout their work — in articles, speeches and personal correspondence. This volume brings together and annotates all this material, including — in this new edition — recently discovered manuscripts by both Marx and Engels. *Hardback £3.00*

**THE LIFE AND
TIMES OF JAMES
CONNOLLY**

C. Desmond Greaves

The standard biography of the greatest of all Irish socialists, itself a major contribution to the history of the struggle for Irish freedom. *Paperback £2.50*



Lawrence & Wishart
39 Museum Street, London WC1A 1LQ



UDR and RUC (soldiers and police recruited locally mainly from the Protestant population — *ed*), who are armed Loyalist paramilitaries as far as we're concerned. Then the question is what are the Loyalists going to do? Are they going to accept that it's all over, that the merry-go-round is over? Are they going to accept a new future and a new Ireland in which we will hold out our hands in friendship? We would want to go forward peacefully. But if there is going to be a bloodbath, it'll come from the Loyalist people, because they will attempt to hold Britain and the rest of the world to ransom by attacking the Catholic people. If they do that, the IRA's going to defend these areas and there could be bloodshed from that. I'm not naive enough to think that there wouldn't be, but the extent of that bloodshed is dependent upon how covertly the British government supports Loyalist attempts to create civil war. The behaviour of the British government is a very important question and will decide how extensive the bloodshed is.

You seem to be opposed to the idea of 'Troops Out Now'?

No, no we're for it. We are for the total and immediate withdrawal of the British troops from the Six Counties. It's our slogan because you can't give the Brits the right to prevaricate around withdrawal. I would like them to get out in 24 hours if they could. They can get out as quickly as they like. In fact the Brits won't get out immediately for very strategic reasons. Because it would lead to complete destabilisation and of course a revolutionary movement can best gain from such a withdrawal. That's why they would not withdraw immediately. But it's not that we care about. We want a commitment that they get out lock, stock and barrel. If they leave behind 30,000 armed Loyalists in the UDR and the RUC, that's a recipe for disaster. The political thinking of the Loyalists would dictate an immediate invasion of Nationalist areas, something like the Zionists did in Palestine to try and consolidate their position.

So when you say you want troops out now, that includes disarming...

The RUC and UDR.

The slogan 'Troops Out Now' includes disarming the police and the Ulster Defence Regiment, the UDR?

Oh yes, oh yes.

Because that isn't clear just from the slogan. It always shows the British army on the posters, whereas you're saying in fact it's got to be more extensive than that.

Well, you see, the position is that in* the country areas the RUC and the UDR do the harassing and the killing, and for that very reason

the IRA bomb and shoot UDR and RUC personnel. Whilst the British army are based more in the cities, although they're also in South Armagh to an extent.

Can I change the subject now? What has been the effect of the hunger strike on the strength of and support for your movement?

Well, the British government, when they set out to carry through the policy of criminalisation in 1976, had a number of aims in mind. They wanted to break the prisoners, they wanted to get the prisoners to carry out prison work, to recognise the institution of the prison administration and to wear prison uniform. But the prisoners refused to wear that prison uniform or to carry out prison work and were locked up in solitary confinement. In March 1978 the prison administration, in a further attempt to break them, refused prisoners proper access to toilet and washing facilities, and in protest against that the prisoners went on the 'no wash, no slop-out' protest which lasted until March 1981. The hunger strike was a further demonstration that the prisoners consider themselves to be political prisoners, and have a political motivation because criminals do not go on hunger strike, nor do criminals think in terms of their fellow prisoner.

The Brits hoped to criminalise the prisoners, and by criminalising them to have criminalised their cause. That is, the right of the Irish people to fight for self-determination. But the Brits failed because the prisoners resisted that policy and went through a hell of a lot of torture in resisting that policy, and then the prisoners eventually went on hunger strike to try and break that deadlock. And by hunger strike the prisoners brought the attention of the world to Ireland. And the prisoners also completely destabilised the situation because they forced everybody in Ireland to have a position. And they destabilised British rule in the North and British influence in the South. By contesting elections, Bobby Sands and Owen Carron won a historic victory, and showed that the prisoners were popularly supported by the nationalist people. The prisoners refused to bend on the hunger strike. In fact the hunger strike was not defeated by the British government. It was subverted and undermined by the actions of understandably distressed relatives who were attacked and morally pressured into breaking the hunger strike by sanctioning medical intervention once their sons went into unconsciousness. The British government, I think, regrets not resolving the present crisis after the first hunger strike because the struggle in Ireland has been internationalised.

Can I ask you a question to do with elections? There now seems to be a real possibility that Provisional Sinn Fein will take over effective leadership of the Catholic population and, even if it doesn't become the undisputed leader, it is clearly going to be a powerful force which can win seats in elections. How will you make use of your electoral support?

We would participate in the electoral process, and I emphasise the electoral process rather than the constitutional process, for a number of reasons. Number one, for far too long the Republicans have allowed the SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party — *ed*) to misrepresent the interests of the Nationalist people. We fought the war and they fought the elections, and as a result of that the Brits always had a ready-made available collaborationist party to represent the Nationalist community. And this had the effect of actually protracting the agony, of giving the Brits no reason to shift out of the situation, because whenever they called constitutional conferences, or had a Northern Ireland Assembly, they always had the SDLP to come along and talk with. So from a revolutionary point of view, by just participating in the elections we can ensure the SDLP have a

hard job, and probably an impossible job, of getting into power, of representing the Nationalist people and then going along and doing dirty deals with the Brits. By participating in elections we can actively prevent that. Of course by participating in elections we can also win actual victories, and with Owen Carron — who's a member of Sinn Fein — as an MP, how can the Brits turn round and say the Republicans have no support? Their whole argument abroad is completely destroyed.

What about your policy of abstention, or not taking the seats you win?

We are abstentionists because we believe in the sovereignty, the independence of the Irish nation. There is no national parliament for the people of Ireland. So there is no chance of us taking up our seats when elected. There is no chance of us attending, we can see no useful purpose. Owen Carron would be one voice out of 635 voices in Westminster. Even if he makes good speeches like Bernadette McAliskis did, or even if he tears the hair out of some Home Affairs minister in the House of Commons, it's only a minor propaganda victory. Owen Carron at present is doing a hell of a lot of constituency work, he is working without any finance at all. Despite the fact that people in this country are forced to pay tax, and despite the fact that he's an elected MP, he gets no money at all from the British government, he does not even get dole because they won't give him dole, they say he won't make himself available for work. But he works 15 to 16 hours a day for the people of that constituency and he's even had problems brought to him from Protestant people now, which is a breakthrough.

What if there was some devolved assembly for Northern Ireland within the UK? Would you be willing to participate in that?

No. We'd totally refuse, we'd boycott the assembly. In the old days, we would have boycotted the elections as well. But there is a new attitude now. We think now that such elections should be contested and we should not allow the SDLP to go unchallenged. But there's no way would we go in and sit down and give the Brits the right to rule our country. The only time we will ever talk to the Brits is when they turn round and say 'we're getting out of Ireland, can you help us to get out quickly?'

What if there's a Labour government in power which makes some general commitment to a united Ireland, and calls a constitutional conference? What would be your attitude towards a conference like that?

Are you talking about a constitutional conference for *all* Ireland, because Labour cannot legislate, a British Labour government cannot legislate for the 26 Counties. Are you talking about a constitutional conference for the Six Counties, or for the whole of Ireland?

No, I'm asking what kind of constitutional conference you would agree to participate in. For example, suppose there was a constitutional conference called jointly by the British government and the Southern government...

Well, we would be very very suspicious of this, because it would be hosted by people who want to determine the political outcome of it. We would have to appraise that situation when we saw it. But it's too early yet, we have not reached that stage. We have not yet broken the will of the British government to stay in Ireland. The Brits have to recognise the right of the Irish people to self-determination, and they have to declare that they're withdrawing — politically, militarily and economically.

But suppose a Labour government declared its intention to withdraw? Unless there's to be a civil war between Protestant and Catholic there has to be a negotiated transition to a United Ireland.

That's right, that's right.

You would presumably be willing to participate in negotiations to achieve such a transition?

As long as those were exactly the parameters, and our principles were respected and met with then there is every possibility we would participate. But equally, we might be too suspicious of the process, if for example they wanted to bring in the UN. I mean the UN has been fucking about with Namibia for years now doing bloody nothing about it, actually covering up for South African invasions into Angolan territory. I don't think the UN has had a success yet, a successful transition of a country to nationhood yet. So we would be very highly suspicious of these internationalist organisations.

I don't think that there can be a capitalist United Ireland. The present 26 Counties is economically a disaster.

But you in principle recognise the need to negotiate the transition?

That's correct, yes.

There is a real possibility that a United Ireland brought about in this way would be a capitalist Ireland. Would you continue as a party struggling for a socialist Ireland or would you, like many traditional Republicans, regard your task as finished once unity was achieved?

Oh no, no, no. We are committed to the establishment of a democratic socialist republic. I don't think that there can be a capitalist United Ireland. The present 26 Counties is economically a disaster. It's owned by foreign investors. The political process is even controlled and to a large extent dictated by those forces. The unemployment rate in both North and South is very high, particularly in the North, and I think we believe that the process of uniting Ireland will unleash a new militancy in the Protestant section of the working class. They're not going to have this Loyalist fascist philosophy to adhere to. Hopefully they're going to turn around and become very militant and very left-wing, and there will be an identity of interest between them and the rest of the Irish working class. The workload obviously is immense, which has to be done to achieve a socialist republic, but we're committed to it. We are a very big force in Ireland, we have a hell of a lot of activists, we have come through an awful lot, and we don't intend just to surrender because the green of the tri-colour is flying over Belfast as well as Dublin.

But that does represent a change compared to the Republican position which saw its task as finished once the British were out?

For years we've been maligned as a Brits out movement. But that is not the case. We are a socialist movement and we are committed to a socialist republic. Because of the nature of this phase of the struggle there is not a great deal of emphasis laid on socialism. But during the process of getting the Brits out people have become very politically conscious. The youth, in both North and South, especially as a result of the hunger strike, have come right over to militant *socialist* republicanism, and that process will continue. •