NORTHERN IRELAND: From Civil Rights to Armed Struggle

RUSSELL STETLER

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NORTHERN IRELAND: FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO ARMED STRUGGLE

BY RUSSELL STETLER

The Neo-Colonial Setting

At the time of the First World War, the Irish fought the first national-liberation war of the twentieth century. The negotiations which brought a truce between the British and a moderate faction of nationalist leaders prefigured the neo-colonial settlements which have dominated much of the political life of the Third World since the Second World War. Ireland was divided in two. Formal independence was granted to twenty-six counties of Eire, although foreign control over key investment sectors tended to nullify the meaning of this independence. The remaining six counties were denied to the nationalists. They were reconstituted as the province of Northern Ireland, which remained intact within the United Kingdom. The only substantial industry within Ireland was located in the provincial capital, Belfast. The socialists within the national liberation movement had always recognized that meaningful industrial development in the republic could not proceed without control of Belfast, just as there was little prospect of socialist ideas gaining hegemony in the national liberation struggle without the adherence of the industrial workers of Belfast.

The problem of winning the workers of Belfast to socialism was further complicated by the fact that they were in the main descended from the families which had colonized Ireland

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Russell Stetler is the author of *The Battle of Bogside* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1970) and editor of *The Military Art of People's War: Selected Writings of General Vo Nguyen Giap,* a Monthly Review Press book.

in the wake of the British conquest, consolidated two centuries before. The descendants of the indigenous Irish population itself remained outside the industrialized sectors of the economy. If the setting were Algiers, rather than Belfast, the differences of skin color would lead us immediately to identify racism as the core of the problem. But in the Irish setting, religious affiliation, rather than skin color, has marked the social identities of the two groups, colonizers and colonized. This crucial difference has obscured the mechanisms at work and confused many outside observers. Our thoughts move too quickly to the Catholic Church, and its viciously reactionary institutional role in places like Spain or Latin America, to allow us to understand what it means for an Irishman to think of himself as a Catholic.

Conor Cruise O'Brien's discussion of this problem is instructive:

> Basically, religious affiliation was—and is—socially, economically, and politically significant, for it distinguishes, with very few exceptions, the natives and their children from the seventeenth-century settlers and their children. The British Crown, in the post-Reformation period, naturally favored the settlement of loyal Protestants, and the dispossession of natives, whose support of the Counter-Reformation was necessarily a form of rebellion: politics and religion were inseparable from the start.
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> The Protestant settlers—Scottish and English—were the gainers, the Catholic natives the losers: antagonistic collective interests and loyalties were established immediately. The natives were dispossessed, but not exterminated nor assimilated nor converted to Protestantism. Their Catholicism became the badge of their identity and their defiance. After the destruction of the Gaelic social order by the end of the seventeenth century and the substitution of English for the Gaelic language—a process completed by the mid-nineteenth century in most of the country—the Catholic Church became almost the sole form of social cohesion of the native people.

Catholic schools provided more than religious instruction; they were a means of preserving the native culture and a nationalist view of Irish history. Other colonized peoples have

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* Conor Cruise O'Brien, "Holy War," *New York Review of Books*, November 6, 1969, p. 10.

frequently had their cultures virtually eradicated; Chicanos and American blacks are now engaged in the task of recreating their own pasts. The Irish maintained a deep sense of their history and refused to send their children to state schools where acts of conquest are celebrated as victories of Western civilization. Bernadette Devlin records in her autobiography the shock which she experienced when she first realized that the children who went to state schools in Northern Ireland admired the Queen, whom she had been taught to regard by republican nuns as a symbol of imperialist oppression!

The ideology of the Protestants in Northern Ireland, on the other hand, has been comparable to that of the French settlers in Algiers or the whites of the American South. Protestant workers have been poor and intensely exploited, enjoying a lower standard of living than their relatives in Britain but maintaining a pathetic sense of dignity and self-respect through a total chauvinist identification with the conquering power. Their ancestors came to the four northeastern counties of Ulster under a plantation system identical to that which the English introduced in Virginia, and they survived by a stony adherence to the frontier spirit and Protestant ethic which built capitalism in America. (The Protestant ethic is alive and well in Northern Ireland, where a housewife polishes her doorknob and says, "There, now. Doesn't that look more Protestant?") The settler community has traditionally enjoyed a set of privileges which divides it sharply from the natives, and each concession of civil rights to the natives has been viewed as a threat to Protestant privilege.

At the time of the national liberation war the Protestant masses felt profoundly menaced by the thought of living in an independent Irish Republic where they would be a minority population. They were mobilized, through traditional secret societies like the Orange Order, into a clandestine military organization known as the Ulster Volunteers Force, which was prepared to secede and declare unilateral independence in the event of a sell-out by the London government; the parallels with the French Army's secret society, the OAS, in Algiers are obvious. The neo-colonial settlement of 1921 obviated this

need and provided a new framework within which the Protestants could consolidate their privileged position and allay their fears. The treaty left the British Parliament in control of decisive fiscal matters (including most taxation) as well as foreign policy, but established a Northern Ireland Parliament to legislate on other matters. The boundaries of the province gave the Protestant population a two-thirds majority. Property qualifications for voting in Northern Ireland elections and notorious local gerrymanders consolidated the hegemony of the Unionist Party, even establishing their control in some areas where the Protestant population was in the minority (such as Derry,* the second largest city).

Militant republican elements in the Sinn Fein party and its military arm, the Irish Republican Army (IRA), refused to accept the 1921 settlement and continued guerrilla warfare throughout the 1920s and sporadically ever since. The specter of the IRA in turn provided the Unionists with a mobilizing issue at every election, permitting them to mystify the politics of the province and inhibiting social and political dissent within the Protestant population despite appalling poverty. A moderate and ineffective Nationalist Party existed in the North as a mirror-image of the Unionists, mobilizing Catholic voters on the question of the partition between North and South and maintaining that national unification, rather than socialism, held the key to remedying the social disabilities of the Irish population. The Unionists nonetheless feared the Nationalists, especially in light of the higher birth rate of Catholics as against Protestants. The final factor of Protestant domination was thus emigration. Acute unemployment obliged a section of the population to emigrate (mainly to English cities) in search of jobs. Discrimination in hiring practices, training programs, union membership, etc., made emigrants preponderantly Catholic.**

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* The Ulster Protestants and the British persist in calling the city "Londonderry," a name which carries heavy colonialist connotations from the days when Derry was owned by London companies.

** For Northern Ireland as a whole, Catholics represent 37 percent of the total population, but 51 percent of the non-adult population. The excess birth rate of Catholics in the province has almost exactly equaled

The advent of social democracy in Britain had important effects in Northern Ireland. Although social legislation enacted by the British Parliament was not constitutionally binding in Northern Ireland, there was an unwritten agreement that the Northern Ireland Parliament would follow the lead of Westminster and enact counterpart legislation on a step-by-step basis. Since the Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont Castle, Belfast, was entirely dependent on the British Exchequer for revenue to implement its own legislation, Westminster had more than moral authority with which to enforce its lead in social policy. When the Labor Government introduced various welfare state measures after the Second World War, the Unionist Government in Belfast followed suit. Although the fundamentalist neanderthals in Stormont had no love for creeping socialism, neither had they any strong aversion to policies which pacified the lower classes without threatening the politics of segregation, discrimination, and privilege upon which their rule was based. In fact, many of the specific policies of social democracy only served to intensify segregation and strengthen the Unionists' power through a centralization of control over a wide range of social institutions. Public housing, for example, provided a simple means of aggravating segregation as an explicit device of political control. Nineteenth-century housing patterns in Northern Ireland tended to be based more on class than on religious affiliation, but political necessity produced pronounced sectarian segregation after 1921. The Bogside area of Derry had once been a working-class slum where Protestants and Catholics lived side by side, but by 1961 only sixteen Protestants lived there. In turn, Catholics of all classes were obliged to live there, by various forms of manipulation and

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the excess emigration rate of Catholics over Protestants. The following statistics show the traditional effect of emigration:

Number of emigrants per annum	1937-1951	1951-1961
Protestants	2,000	4,100
Catholic	2,800	5,100
Emigrants as % of religious group		
Protestant	0.2	0.45
Catholic	0.6	1.1

intimidation. The effects of earlier gerrymanders were accentuated by the building of new public housing estates in Bogside and other segregated areas and the corresponding allotment of council flats by the Unionist-controlled city government along purely sectarian lines. The welfare state merely provided an opportunity to rationalize the whole process.

State economic planning also gave the Unionists a powerful means of controlling *underdevelopment* for political ends. Two basic patterns of underdevelopment had been firmly established in the nineteenth century: Ireland's in relation to Britain, and that of rural Ireland in relation to Ulster and particularly to the Belfast area. The general causes reflect a classic pattern. The area's wealth was extracted and exported to London. What little industrial development occurred was doubly dependent on Britain both for investments and markets. The tendency to concentrate industrial production related to various factors, including the political loyalty and Protestant value system of the Ulster plantation settlers. Its geographical proximity to the English port of Liverpool was convenient in terms of the markets for Ulster linen production. Steam spinning was introduced in Belfast in 1829, thus eliminating the one advantage which rural areas had hitherto enjoyed (dependence on water as a power source). A capitalist mode of textile production was rapidly established in Eastern Ulster, while undifferentiated labor and home production continued to prevail in the West. Ulster succeeded in avoiding the swamping which hit the Irish market in the mid-nineteenth century because its linen—which did not compete with any English trade—was the only protected industry in Ireland. Since Ulster's land was not uniquely tied to the potato, it also succeeded in avoiding the worst effects of the famines which were soon to decimate the population to the South. Cities like Derry achieved no local development and were consigned to the role of satellites of Belfast. Political instability in predominantly nationalist areas became a new disincentive to investment in the early twentieth century, and the gap between Belfast and the rest of Northern Ireland (particularly the western half of the province) widened. Even when Britain's economy was at full production during

the Second World War, Northern Ireland failed to attract a significant number of factories for war production. Postwar UK economic planning designated Northern Ireland as a development area, but the details were left in the hands of the Unionist politicians, in whose political interest it was to keep nationalist areas underdeveloped. In the crudest terms, jobs in Catholic (nationalist) areas would eliminate the need to emigrate, and the excessive Catholic birth rate would ultimately give the Nationalists political power.

Northern Ireland's general problem of underdevelopment in relation to Britain was not solved in any event. A major effort was made to attract investment from Britain and abroad, including capital grants of up to 33 percent of capital outlay on plant and machinery. Advance factories were built by the government and given to new firms at a derating (on property tax) of 75 percent. In addition, these firms benefited from (employment) tax rebates, fuel subsidies, grants for engaging business consultants, and grants for shifting key workers. Despite these measures, the number of jobs in civil manufacturing dropped by 6,000 to 179,000 in the period 1949 to 1964. The reduction of the agricultural work force was even sharper: the number of jobs dropped by 34,000 to 68,000 in the same period. Public investment stood at £46 *per capita* (as against less than £40 *per capita* in the rest of the United Kingdom), but this hardly compensated for the acute lack of private capital. The effects of continuing decline were sharpest in the nationalist areas most remote from the regional metropolis, Belfast. Between 1945 and 1966, 217 new firms came to Northern Ireland, of which one hundred were sponsored (i.e., received the 33 percent Industrial Development Grant for capital outlay) and the remaining 117 moved into advance government-owned factories. 76 percent of the private capital invested was English, 5 percent Scottish and 19 percent foreign. Of the 217 firms, only twenty (or 9 percent) were sited west of an imaginary line running from Castlerock on the North Coast to Killyleagh in Armagh, dividing Northern Ireland exactly in half. Some sixty-seven firms had come to the province before the first came to Derry, its second largest city,

in 1951. The second came to Derry two years later, but the third was not in production until 1960. By then, 121 new firms had been established east of the imaginary Castlerock-Killyleagh line, of which forty were in Belfast. During this entire period, only seven of the 217 new firms went to Derry (with a population of over 60,000), whereas nine went to Coleraine (population 12,000), ten to Bangor (population 24,000), thirteen to Lurgan (population 18,000) and eight to Newry (population 12,500). More advance factory space was provided in either Larne, Ballymena, or Lurgan than in Derry. In fact, the distribution of government-owned factories was inversely proportional to the amount of unemployment, which stands at more than 20 percent in the Western half of the province.*

Disincentives to investment in Northern Ireland (prior to the civil disorders, which constitute a further disincentive) included high transportation costs, relatively small labor markets (despite high unemployment, the towns of Northern Ireland cannot offer the thousands of employees which a giant corporation might require), lack of technical and managerial skill, as well as the distance from the financial capital and the seat of fiscal power. The only firms which do come (and particularly to the most underdeveloped areas) are those which are best equipped to ignore its defects (especially its marginality). These large corporations are, in turn, most likely to leave when the terms of the government subsidies expire.

Origins of the Civil Rights Movement

This is the setting for the political events which began with civil rights marches in 1968 and continue at present in the form of a rudimentary armed struggle against the British. These events also have explicitly political antecedents, which we should now consider. Two factors seem particularly important. One is the role of youth, principally in the form of a new generation of university-educated Catholics, influenced in

* My economic analysis is stated more fully in the first chapter of my book *The Battle of Bogside* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1970). A bibliography can be found there.

a broad way by socialist ideas and the worldwide growth of a New Left. The second is a development within the traditional republican movement, which underwent a two-year period of intensive self-criticism following the debacle of their 1956-1962 guerrilla campaign.

A series of educational reforms after the Second World War contributed to the increase in the number of educated Catholics. The Education Act (Northern Ireland), 1947, is a typical example of Stormont legislation designed to keep in step with Westminster, despite firm opposition from all sides within the Northern Ireland community. Like its counterpart legislation for the rest of the United Kingdom, the Act sought to eliminate the anachronism of all-age schools, channel children at age eleven into secondary schools for academic or vocational training, and increase attendance in such schools by offering more scholarships and state schools. The state agreed to pay all teachers' salaries and up to 65 percent of construction and maintenance costs in Catholic schools. Extremist Protestant groups like the Orange Order were enraged, and the Minister of Education was forced to resign in 1949. But the Act stayed, and in 1957 the school-leaving age was raised to fifteen, thus extending the impact of the reform. Educational need was still much greater than could be satisfied, and facilities for Catholics and Protestants were unequal. But the number of Catholic families who could afford to send their children through secondary school increased sharply. This, in turn, increased the number of Catholics in attendance at Queen's University, Belfast, as well as fostering middle-class aspirations which could only lead to frustration in the prevailing conditions of discrimination. Catholics account for only 4 percent of those in Northern Ireland with an income of $5,000 per year or more; 12 percent of those employed in local government, and 6 percent of those in central government are Catholic, despite vast improvement in the number who qualify.

A core of young socialists developed among students and ex-students at Queen's in the late sixties. Some had lived in England and developed their ideas in rather orthodox Marxist groups there. Others adopted socialist views more hesitantly,

with no political experience outside Northern Ireland. This nucleus became the mainstay of the People's Democracy (PD), a structureless mass student movement formed in the fall of 1968 following a Belfast civil rights demonstration. Their politics represented a sharp reaction against the mindless nationalism of earlier generations. They equated traditional nationalists with the Unionists (calling them Green and Orange Tories, respectively). Although they would often speak of a socialist republic as their goal, the emphasis was clearly placed more on socialism than republicanism. They were fiercely critical of the Lynch government in the South and stressed its (neo-colonial) submission to Britain. In the North, they consistently denounced sectarian (i.e., all-Catholic) politics and called for a working-class alliance of Protestants and Catholics. The prospect of such an alliance is dim indeed, but the PD has nonetheless had an important impact insofar as it has helped to develop socialist consciousness within the Catholic constituency.

Before turning to the more complex question of the IRA's evolving impact, we should narrate the brief history of the recent civil rights struggle. Within the world of conventional parliamentary politics a number of events helped to occasion the rise of the civil rights movement. In 1963 Lord Brookeborough ended his two decades of unbroken rule as Northern Ireland Premier and was replaced by Captain Terence (now Lord) O'Neill. The new Premier had served in the key post of Minister of Finance under Brookeborough and was therefore acutely sensitive to Stormont's dependence on British approval. A year after he took office the Labor Government came to power in London. The Ulster Unionists enjoyed a traditional association with the Tory Party, which could be no asset in delicate dealings with the Wilson administration. O'Neill was conscious of the need to maintain an image of Northern Ireland which would be acceptable to the new rulers in Westminster. He correctly estimated that relations with Eire would matter more to Labor than the situation of a few Catholic voters in the North, and he astutely moved toward a normalization of relations with the Irish Free State (chiefly in terms

of trade).* The most dramatic sign of change came in 1965 when O'Neill received the Irish Prime Minister, Sean Lemass, at Stormont Castle.

In this atmosphere of limited liberalization (counterpointed by the existence of a growing middle-class Catholic constituency), a broad coalition called the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (CRA) was formed in February 1967. It was set up as a non-political front, and its first governing committee included members of Sinn Fein (the republican movement, of which the IRA is the military wing), the Nationalist Party, the Northern Ireland Labor Party, the Republican Labor Party, the Communist Party (an orthodox, peaceful, coexistence-oriented party), and the National Democrats. Its first chairman was a trade unionist, and its aims were defined as follows:

To define the basic rights of all citizens.
To protect the rights of the individual.
To highlight all possible abuses of power.
To demand guarantees for freedom of speech.
To inform the public of their lawful rights.

The Civil Rights Association was gradually transformed from a small, middle-class pressure group into a mass movement well beyond the expectations and control of its founders. The movement grew in the face of harsh repression of both an official and unofficial character. Although the government took little action in regard to civil rights grievances, even the moderation of O'Neill's remarks to the world press aroused great anxiety and resentment among socially underprivileged Protestants, who understood any concessions to Catholics as a threat to their own marginal advantages.

August 1968 to August 1969 was the year of civil rights. A series of moderate marches throughout the province evoked brutal attacks from the police, their auxiliaries (the B-Specials), and Protestant vigilantes. Demonstrations were interspersed with promises of reform from O'Neill, and cries of "Betrayal" and "No surrender" from the Protestant backlash led by former

* O'Neill's move of course followed a gradual reversal of Eire's trade policy from high protective tariffs to free trade.

Minister of Home Affairs William Craig and the Reverend Ian Paisley. Many ended in riots, with Catholic street gangs battling the Royal Ulster Constabulary as it rampaged through the Bogside ghetto of Derry or the Falls Road of Belfast. When the CRA vacillated before promises of reform, the PD was on hand to keep up militant pressure. O'Neill came under great pressure from London and suffered right-wing defections from within his party and cabinet. He survived the February 1969 General Election, but his showing was hardly impressive. Right-wing Protestants showed increased electoral strength, and civil rights candidates split the traditional Nationalist vote in several constituencies. Six weeks later, after another major riot in Derry, O'Neill resigned the Premiership and was replaced by Major James Chichester-Clark. The worst of the year's rioting erupted in the summer, following annual Protestant marches on July 12 and August 12, two holidays which at once celebrate seventeenth-century victories of Protestants over Catholics and declare, in a martial atmosphere, the present-day domination of settler over native. After three days of rioting in Derry (during which the disturbances soon spread to several other cities, with the most violent confrontations of all occurring in Belfast), the British intervened militarily. In a matter of days, they had deployed several thousand troops across Northern Ireland, and an atmosphere of uneasy calm prevailed.

Growth of Armed Struggle

At first, the troops were welcomed in the Catholic communities, in much the same way as Federal marshals were welcomed by SNCC workers in Mississippi in the summers of 1963 and 1964. They were accepted as impartial guardians of a law and order that would redress the grievances which had developed under the repressive rule of the Ulster Protestants, whose police consistently behaved with the decorum of Southern sheriffs. It was widely assumed that the presence of the British Army would put an end to excesses of brutality and that the Labor Government might itself intervene directly to meet the modest demands of the civil rights movement. If there was still a high degree of nationalist (anti-British) consciousness among Catholics, there was nonetheless also a strong

sense of political realism and a widespread acceptance of the material benefits which derived from association with the British welfare state (and which would be lost if Northern Ireland were incorporated into impoverished, underdeveloped Eire). But in a matter of six to eight months, the attitude toward the British troops had moved 180 degrees. The insurgent ghettos which had fought the RUC and B-Specials were now battling the British Army.

Three factors account for this change. One is the general socio-economic framework of the Northern Ireland problem, discussed above, which makes it virtually intractable without radical measures. The second factor was the unwillingness of the Wilson administration to make even token moves in a radical direction in an election year. The Labor government clearly knew the risks of a violent Protestant backlash against any meaningful reforms, and it refused to run this risk at a time when the Tories were already campaigning for law and order. Labor wanted to sit on the whole Northern Ireland problem until after the election. It couched every proclamation on the problem in non-controversial terms within a consensus which Liberals and Conservatives would share, effectively leaving practical day-to-day matters in the hands of the Army Command in Belfast under General Freeland, a veteran colonial soldier renowned for his command of the Mau Mau campaign in Kenya. The third factor was the resurgence of republican leadership in Catholic strongholds.

Because of its illegal status throughout Ireland, the republican movement is difficult to evaluate. Many commentators had come to regard the IRA as a cynical hoax, mutually perpetrated by its aging commandants and the Stormont Cabinet, in the way that HUAC and the CP kept alive the myths that the CP led every progressive movement in the USA. My own analysis is therefore tentative and subject to revision as more facts come to light. There is no doubt that a strong undercurrent of republican sentiment has remained in Catholic areas of Northern Ireland for fifty years, but it would seem that the organizational strength of the Sinn Fein party and its military arm, the IRA, deteriorated considerably over the years.

Circulation of the republican newspaper, *United Irishman,* dropped from 100,000 in 1957-1958 to 14,000 in 1967. An armed campaign was launched in 1956, but collapsed in utter failure in 1962. Its leaders acknowledged that the campaign had no political resonance among the masses of the Catholic population. Its actions were often no more than isolated bombings. There was an absence of visible anti-imperialist thrust, since the British troops were not present and the local neo-colonialist police force was able to handle the campaign successfully. Many IRA members and sympathizers were arrested, and they stood mute in the courtroom, feeling that even a political defense would imply an unwanted recognition of the imperialist courts. The result was a futile sacrifice of the leadership on the altar of purist principles.

An important self-criticism followed. An IRA Council met virtually every other weekend for some eighteen months during 1963-1965. It was agreed that the movement should strive to integrate itself more deeply in mass agitational struggle (tenants' committees, campaigns for fishing rights, civil rights activity, etc.). The purist, abstentionist position on imperialist institutions was rejected in favor of political defenses in the courtroom, and even parliamentary candidates in certain circumstances. There can be no question that republicans were to play an important role in the civil rights struggle as it developed in the late sixties, but the magnitude of this role cannot be accurately ascertained at this time. Likewise, republicans did play a vital role on local defense committees in the Bogside and the Falls Road, but their military preparedness seems to have been virtually nil in the August 1969 period when pogroms were widely feared and armed self-defense might have been welcomed. A further factor in the evolution of the republican movement is the intervention of young, highly politicized revolutionaries, especially in the South. The IRA now describes its program as socialist, and this change in course undoubtedly owes something to the role of young Marxist-Leninists.*

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* The latest word reaching me indicates that PD is losing all support, with its younger members joining Marxist groups and going over to the Republicans.

In January 1970 there was a split in the Sinn Fein. One faction was sharply critical of the IRA's lack of military preparedness and at the same time unhappy with its abandonment of traditional abstentionist principles. This wing is known as the Provisionals. On the one hand, it emphasizes armed struggle as the necessary path to liberation but, on the other, attacks the rest of the republicans for having been taken over by "extreme socialist" elements. One Provisional leader whom I interviewed in Dublin charged that the other faction wanted to "turn Ireland into a revolutionary socialist state along the lines of Cuba." He claimed to be a more moderate socialist, and when I asked whether there was a country which provided a model for the forms he had in mind he immediately suggested Denmark! The politics of both factions are obviously muddled and confused at this time, but this confusion should not be exaggerated, since it reflects little more than their general isolation from the world revolutionary movements. As the struggle proceeds, we can expect much of this parochialism to be lost.

Whether a new basis of unity will be found between the contending factions for republican leadership is impossible to predict from this distance, just as it is impossible to determine who is responsible for any particular armed action which we may read about. Suffice it to say that we have confirmed the massive importation of arms into Northern Ireland and that an intensive program of military training is underway. Bombings occur daily, principally in Belfast. Sporadic sniping incidents are also commonplace. The British Army's consistent response has been a classic reliance on counter-insurgency technique and (in an echo of Curtis LeMay) "superior firepower." The British rely on weapons of community punishment, like CS (a "super tear gas"), which distribute their effects disproportionately upon those whose age and health make them least likely to be involved in riots. The political effect is to unify the community behind those who fight the Army: the street gangs, in the first instance, and the republican adherents of armed struggle in longer range political terms.

Implications for Britain

What is perhaps most significant in these developments is that another Vietnam has come home. More than any other country in the West, Britain has fostered the myth of a non-violent, civilized society, symbolized by the unarmed London bobby. Its working class has been integrated into bourgeois society in an unparalleled way, not by virtue of material corruption (wages remain incredibly low) but through an incorporation into an enormous, bureaucratic, century-old trade union structure regulating, canalizing, and sterilizing every aspect of class struggle. As in most of the advanced industrial nations, the condition of ever-present violence understood by Marx as the essence of class struggle has been muted, and the classically violent set of relations has been transferred to another sector, which we can designate conceptually as non-integrated economic minorities (like the blacks, Chicanos, and Puerto Ricans in the United States or the two million foreign workers in France). Increasingly, the Third World populations within the advanced nations are responding with armed resistance to the daily violence and racism which they experience, just as their brothers do in the Third World itself. Even in its period of greatest peace at home, Britain was fighting a series of Vietnams throughout its former colonies (Malaya, Kenya, and Aden). Today its counter-insurgency in the Arabian Gulf States continues; but for the first time, Vietnam has come home to Britain, in the armed resistance of the colonized Irish within a territory which the British claim as part of the United Kingdom.

The repercussions within Britain itself have yet to be felt, but it is not farfetched to imagine Irish riots within the largest English industrial cities as the repression in Northern Ireland escalates. There are tens of thousands of Irish workers in Britain, and many maintain their families in Northern Ireland. They are by no means integrated into the union structure. A large proportion work in the building trades or in other forms of casual labor outside the union structure altogether. Nor are the Irish in Britain culturally assimilated. They maintain a largely independent culture, through Irish pubs, dance

halls, and, once again, the Catholic Church.

The response of the British Left has been varied. Ten thousand British troops in Malaya would have evoked a more united, clear-cut response. Few would have argued (as some do in regard to Ireland) that the troops have a progressive role, bringing bourgeois democracy to a fascist province. Dogmatic adherence to socialist orthodoxy has prevented some groups from appreciating the Third World character of the Irish struggle, but it is unlikely that such dogmatism will survive a period of intensifying bloodshed in Ulster. The opportunities for concrete solidarity with the Irish struggle are great and certainly include forms of strategic sabotage of the British military. In many ways, the response of the British Left to this crisis will measure its prospect for serious ongoing activity on other fronts; this is an opportunity to escape the paralysis which it has suffered for so long. Ireland provides an organic means of relating to the primary contradiction of our epoch, that between the imperialist ruling classes and the national movements for self-determination. If the English movement can build revolutionary consciousness around this struggle, they will have rescued Marxism from the corridors of the British museum and put it back into the struggles of the streets.


CAMBRIDGE
ENGLAND