

SOCIALIST REPUBLIC

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LESSONS OF DRUMCREE

Drumcree was a victory for the orange mob. It demonstrated their "right" to freely indulge in sectarian intimidation and their immunity from the massive legal and repressive apparatus that dominates the nationalist community in the North.

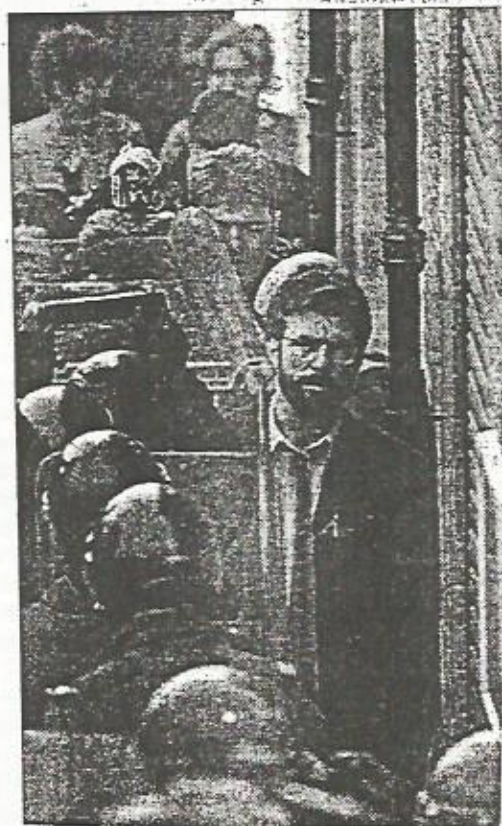
It showed that the North remains a sectarian hell-hole and the RUC a bigoted Orange force.

It showed that when it comes to the crunch Britain will not confront the Orange mob that remains the base of its occupation in Ireland.

It shows that the Downing Street declaration and all the negotiations between Dublin and London are based on a lie - the lie that through "equality of the two traditions" we can accommodate Orange triumphalism. The process they are engaged in will lead only to capitulation to bigotry.

The "negotiations" at Drumcree are a lesson in what all-party negotiations at Stormont mean - a route to the return of Orange rule. In one word it has shown that the peace process is a lie and that Sinn Fein support for it has been a disaster.

***RUC out of Nationalist areas!
Disband the Orange RUC!
SDLP out of Stormont talks!
Dublin: Scrap the framework deal !***



Gerry Adams and residents of the Lower Ormeau under curfew by the RUC

The task that faces us is not to accommodate to Orangeism in Ireland but to defeat it and the British presence which is its lifeline.

We had 25 years of a militarist strategy under republican leadership. It failed. It has taken only 2 years to expose the bankruptcy of an alliance with Dublin and the SDLP.

We need a new leadership and strategy. We need a movement against sectarianism. Not a Catholic movement, but one which unites with all those Protestant workers who are not members of the Orange order, do not support it and oppose its bigotry and takes the struggle out of the confines of the North to unite workers in all 32 counties in a struggle to defeat the forces which divide and weaken us as a class.

The "Nationalist family" is no answer to Orange bigotry and imperialist reaction

"Between a rock and a hard place" That's how the RUC described their "confrontation" with Orangism at Drunree church. Nothing could be further from the truth. There was never any intention to confront Orangism. The only intention was to stop them if they would agree to be stopped. By the end of the first day, when it was clear that the Unionist bigots were intent on marching, British statements all referred to the need for negotiation - that is, attempting to persuade the Orangemen to at least meet the Catholic residents of the Gervaghy Road before they marched. When even this concession proved to much for them the march was forced through, with maximum violence directed at the Nationalist population. The speed of the reversal, the explosion of state violence and the way in which some of Britain's main allies, like the leaders of the four main churches, were used as decoys, strongly suggest that a section of the RUC was on the point of revolt. Unionist leader David Trimble hinted at this when he referred to the RUC Chief constable as being surrounded by "Yes men". The implication was that he, Trimble, was surrounded by "No" men and had a far more realistic picture of the role of the police than their leadership.

RUC ROLE

That role was all too evident on the streets. Despite a massive apparatus of state repression honed over 27 years of revolt the Orangemen were allowed total freedom to mobilise, while the nationalist area was totally sealed off. The RUC fired a few desultory plastic bullets only when under direct attack, as opposed to 6000 discharged later in nationalist areas. Blockades which paralysed the state and blocked the main airport and ports were much more the work of the RUC than of the Orangemen. A few boozy bigots was all that was needed for the RUC to seal off roads and threaten anyone who tried to pass. They looked on blankly as Catholics were intimidated and

burnt out of their homes.

The kid glove treatment of the Loyalists contrasted sharply with the vicious batoning of sit-down demonstrators at Gervaghy Road and the machine-gun rapidity with which plastic bullets were fired when the residents fought back - a rate matched by massive state violence and brutality used to suppress nationalists across the North. New energy enthused the RUC and after being unable to curtail the Orangemen they suddenly found it possible to curfew an entire community on Belfast's Ormeau Road for 2 days and also to call up British army forces. Only the most naive were surprised to find that troop reinforcements rushed in during an Orange revolt were in fact there to suppress the nationalist reaction to the British U-turn,

One Catholic was killed at random by the UVF. A demonstrator was killed in Derry by the British army, but when Ormeau Road residents went to court they found that they could not prove to the judges' satisfaction that the British state owed them a duty of care!

The bigotry shown by the state forces and the judiciary was reflected in other state organs like the police authority [one of whose members was spotted on the Orange barricades]. Complaints from Dublin and the SDLP were met by contemptuous dismissal, with an undertone of the racism which infects the British ruling class. In fact Drunree was a victory for Orangism and the British, unwilling to confront it, are now using that victory in a new imperialist offensive.

The remark by Secretary of state Patrick Mayhew that the British could not guarantee that there would be no more Drumcrees is a clear indication of that offensive. Future talks will have a strengthened Orange veto. Negotiations at the Party talks at Stormont will have the same character as "negotiations" at Drumcree.

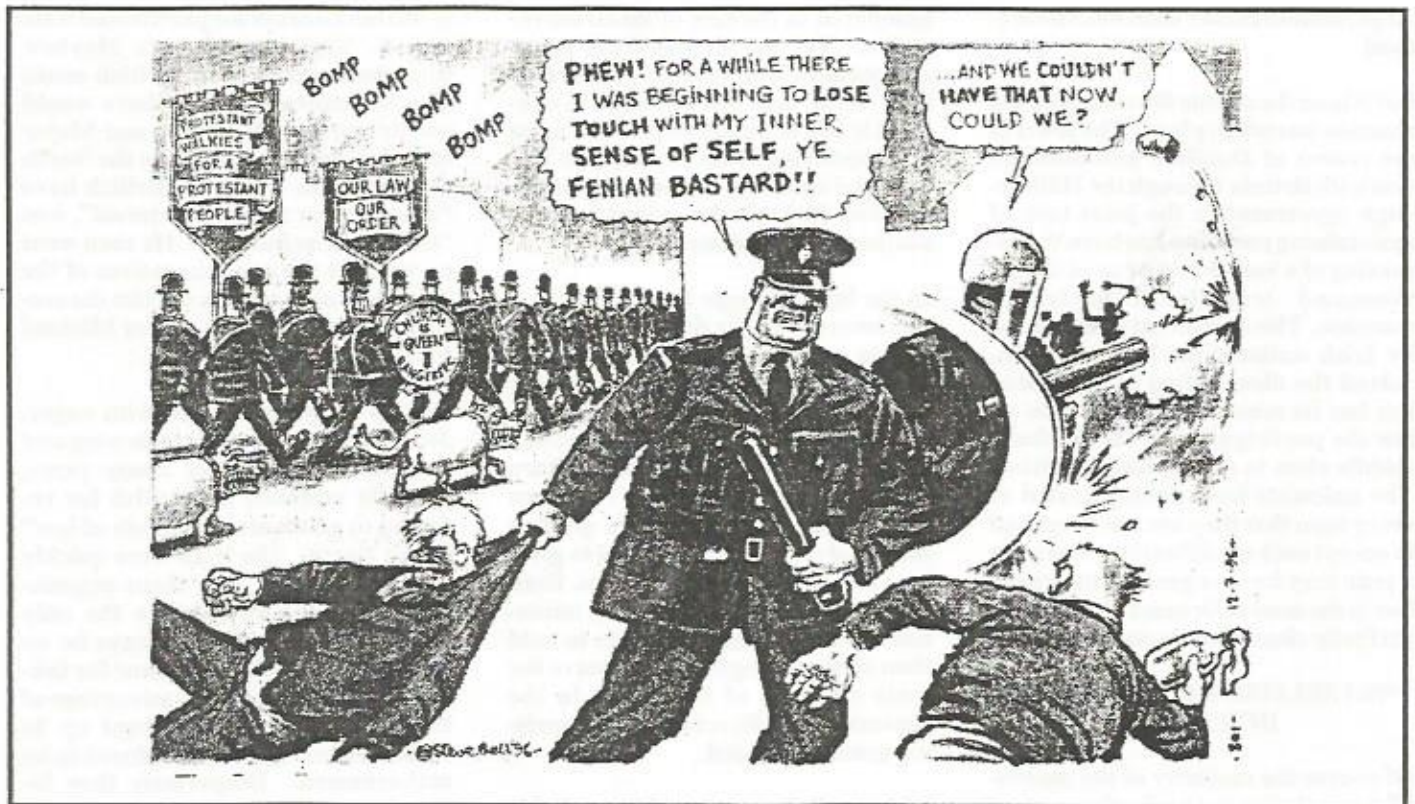
The outcome, an Orange sectarian state, is well signposted in advance.

All this throws nationalism into crisis. The peace process is exposed for the joke that it is. The client nature of Bourgeois nationalism and their inability to offer any real resistance is thrown into sharp relief. In the face of all this Sinn Fein cling to their "pan-nationalist alliance" to the extent of dampening organisationally and politically the spontaneous mass anger that has developed.

ORANGISM

Part of this is their borrowing from bourgeois nationalism the slogan of "equality of the two traditions" and thus the need to negotiate a "compromise" with orangism. This is pure farce. The Orange order is not a cultural organisation. It is an ultra-reactionary populist organisation that organises secretly throughout the state structures to perpetuate sectarian privilege. The annual "Twelfth" demonstrations have all the cultural significance of a dog urinating on a lamppost. The Union Jack and other slogans of "Loyalty" are prominently displayed in the workforce as sectarian markers which help intimidate Catholic workers and remind Protestant workers which "side" they are on. March routes are traditionally planned to pass through Catholic areas in order to humiliate and subjugate them. This has the added advantage of drawing in the state forces to imprison the nationalists in their ghettos and remind the police of their duty to defend sectarian privilege and the sectarian state.

The Orange order is not some peripheral leftover from a bygone age, but the central force in maintaining what remains a sectarian hell-hole in the North of Ireland. Every year it reinvigorates and reinforces the intimidation and discrimination that keeps Catholic unemployment at over double the rate for Protestant workers and renews its links within the state forces



for Nationalists only.

The Orange leaders quite consciously articulated their programme at Drumcree. "The right of loyal subjects to walk the Queen's highway" was not some expression of democratic rights but a demand for privilege - that they might march while the nationalists are prevented from marching. Similarly protests about "using the law against law-abiding people" are reminders to the police that repression is only to be directed at nationalists.

As the protest continued Orangism became a great deal more rabid. In unconscious parody of white supremacists supporters publicly defended the "ethnic cleansing" of Catholics, either on the grounds that they were burning themselves out to discredit orangism or that they themselves were guilty of ethnic cleansing by moving into "Protestant" areas and thus "forcing" Protestants to leave. Not one Unionist leader blinked when the UVF shot a Catholic taxi driver dead to show how upset they were at the rerouting of the march. Unionist leader Trimble went on to meet the local UVF unit.

Orangism has one other role. It's the glue that draws together the different elements of unionism in a populist all-class front. It's this aspect that came to the fore at Drumcree. In front were the bourgeois politicians. Their "law and order" credentials had enabled the British to place condition after

condition on republicanism before these respectable politicians could even dream of meeting them. Now they were able to lead an uprising against the British. In the middle were the Orange mob. In the background the death squads of the UVF. Underground were the real representatives of the RUC, able to reassure the loyalists that they would never allow themselves to be used in any real confrontation with "their own".

The virulent outburst by this alliance had of course a more specific goal than the simple defence of sectarian privilege. Its aim was to change the points of reference of the "peace process" decisively in their favour.

SHARP RIGHT

The "peace process" involved a Dublin government willing to support partition and a republican leadership willing to settle for a good deal less than a united Ireland. In the place of the traditional republican programme came the demand for "equality of the two traditions". This was meant to reassure loyalism that their "Britishness" would be respected. In fact the unionist reaction to the whole process was totally negative. The price of peace - equality - was one that they were unwilling to pay. For loyalists their Britishness is their sectarian privilege.

So the whole process has been marked by Unionist obstruction and obscured by an ideology that defined the divi-

sion as a cultural one rather than in terms of a political reaction fueled by imperialism. The unionists were able to hold up talks for two years by demanding the surrender of IRA weapons as a precondition and have demanded that acceptance of a partitionist outcome should also be a precondition. Their price for a talks date was elections to an embryo local assembly which they hoped to use as a launching pad for a new sectarian local administration with a permanent and built-in unionist majority. Even then the peace talks opened with a breath-taking display of bigotry when they accused US Senator George Mitchell of being a Catholic! They followed this display with six weeks of procedural wrangling aimed at tilting the terms of debate even further in their favour and giving them the power to halt discussion at any time.

This is not some process confined to the leadership. The political collapse of republicanism has been followed by a sharp shift to the right within the base of unionism. Every test of opinion has led to increased support for the most reactionary candidates - the present leader, David Trimble, owes his place to the first class display of bigotry he showed leading the Orange mob at Drumcree in 1995. A new horde of ideologues has arisen to put new flesh on the hoary claims of unionism - a recent report from the local economic research institute said that the massive levels of unemployment among Catholic workers were due to

large families rather than discrimination!

But it is on the streets that the greatest reaction has taken place. The jewel in the crown of Dublin's accommodation with Britain through the Hillborough agreement in the joint task of maintaining partition has been the rerouting of a half-dozen or so of the six thousand traditional sectarian marches. This maximum programme by Irish nationalism in no way involved the dismantling of sectarianism but its minor modification to allow the participation of the Catholic middle class in supporting partition. The unionists have demonstrated at every turn that they are not prepared to accept such modification. For over a year they have organised to draw a line in the sand at Drumcree and make perfectly clear what is on offer.

"NO SELFISH OR STRATEGIC INTEREST"

Of course the majority of the nationalist population are perfectly aware of the nature of Orangism, although this had been somewhat obscured by nationalist and republican adoption of the "two cultures" ideology. Their illusions rested in the intentions of the British and in the role of imperialism generally.

In the process of a long period of secret negotiation with the Republicans the British stated that they had no selfish, strategic or economic interest in Ireland. This statement has been widely accepted by elements of the republican leadership and wide sections of the left. Yet taken at its face value it is an assertion that Britain is no longer an imperialist power. Of course the wide acceptance is based on demoralisation rather than logic and goes along with an equally blind belief that wider imperialist interests in the EU and US will in some way play a progressive role.

In fact British policy throughout the conflict in the North of Ireland has been remarkably consistent. The sectarian assembly at Stormont was unable to put down the mass nationalist uprising launched by the Civil Rights movement of the '60s. The British were forced to dissolve it and ever since they have been trying to put Humpty Dumpty together again. Their major problem has been that the Orange alliance is no longer strong enough or stable enough to rule on its own but is too reactionary and bigoted to accept the co-option of sections of the Catholic middle class. All the attempts to establish a settlement have

founded in the face of sectarian reaction. Yet the British have never entered into direct conflict with Orangism. Their task has not been to confront it but to preserve it as the mass base justifying their presence in Ireland and enabling to dominate developments in both the colony and the southern semi-colony.

In the long struggle the British have one success. In the drive for stability and as part of an attempt to halt the electoral advance of Sinn Fein in the wake of the hunger strikes of the '80s, the British signed the Hillborough agreement with Dublin. The southern capitalists recognised the Northern colony and in return were given a minor advisory role in trying to gloss over its worst sectarian features. Even this meant a mass uprising by unionism but the British were able to hold then at arms length and preserve the main elements of the deal. In the absence of any direct target the uprising gradually faded.

Irish capitalists were able to divide and isolate the republicans and justify a higher level of repression while also silencing a lot of external criticism. The whole peace process is in fact an imperialist offensive which attempts to follow up this advance with a more permanent settlement. The republicans are minor players, dragged on board by Irish capitalism when they recognised the failure of a militarist strategy and developed a policy of unity with the capitalist leadership of the "nationalist family". The British would rather they were excluded if they can't be forced to publicly and unconditionally surrender.

The significance of Drumcree is that it blows the whole ideology of the peace process to smithereens.

JUNION PARTNER

The weight that Britain gives to the various treaties solemnly signed with the Irish bourgeoisie was shown by the fact that Dublin learnt of the decision to force the march through from the television screens. The British were not slow to rub salt in their wounds. John Major spelt out what was on offer in a television interview. No-one could seriously expect the British to confront loyalism. They would continue to try and go round them and persuade them. Whatever the result of that process would be would be the basis of a settlement - not the nationalist "maximum programme" as outlined in the Downing Street declaration, but something much less, showing many of the raw

sectarian bones of the partitioned state intact. Secretary of state Mayhew then declared that the British could give no assurances that there would not be another Drumcree and Major followed this by saying that the North of Ireland, in which the British have "no selfish or strategic interest", was "as British as Surrey"! He then went on to meet the representatives of the Loyalist death squads despite the sectarian murder of taxi-driver Michael McGoldrick by the UVF.

Dublin capitalists boiled with anger. John Bruton, the most right-wing and pro-British leader for many years, publicly attacked the British for refusing to guarantee "the rule of law" in the North. The Irish were quickly brought to heel. For them negotiations with the British are the only game in town and will always be on British terms. All their plans for taking the offensive to take advantage of British embarrassment went up in smoke when the British refused to be embarrassed. Desperately they focused on an attempt to accelerate the talks process. After days of meetings they emerged grim-faced. The six weeks of procedural delay were to be ended - at the price of diluting the role of the chair, US senator Mitchell, and putting a series of levers in the hands of the unionists which will enable them to roadblock the discussions any time they like.

The SDLP resigned en masse from the embryo Stormont assembly to assuage the mass anger in the nationalist population that led to three days of hand to hand fighting with the state forces. They hoped to head off calls for them to pull out of the substantive talks.

SINN FEIN DIPLOMACY

They need not have worried. The only organisation that could have issued that call with effect - the republican movement - was still firmly locked into their strategy of diplomacy. Rather than looking to pull the SDLP and Dublin out of talks they were looking for a way in themselves. They saw Unionist leader Trimble's united front with the Loyalist death squads as making nonsense of the demand for a ceasefire and the surrender of weapons as preconditions for their entry. The republican paper, *An Phoblacht*, called on the front page for the Orange state to be smashed. Inside they spelt out how - by a diplomatic offensive led by Dublin.

They set out to channel and control the mass anger. Only a few major demonstrations were called. These

were confined to a few venues. Mass leafleting took place, but these did not give times or places, which were passed on by word of mouth through Sinn Fein branches. Local mobilisations were channelled into 'relief committees' with tasks like gathering medical supplies.

Politically things were even worse. The republican line nowhere confronted the reactionary reality of orangism. They held to the capitalist line of "equality of the two traditions" and invited the SDLP on to their platforms without making any demands on them - leaving them free to call for "restraint" and rein in the mass anger. Their slogan of "No negotiation - no march" ignores the fact that no amount of negotiation will make Orange marches acceptable and is aimed at the talks process - calculating that if they can force orangemen to speak to them this will weaken their ban from the talks.

Within a week the fruit of this strategy was evident. The mass upsurge was largely demobilised. The capitalist government in Dublin not only had not made any advances or got Sinn Fein their ticket to the talks, they hadn't even had the nerve to end their own ban on direct contact with Sinn Fein!

The conclusion of the following An Phoblacht? Dublin must learn to stand up to the British! Many of their own supporters could tell the republican leadership that Irish capitalism has failed to learn this lesson in a whole historical epoch and that their class interests will forever prevent them from learning it!

The real dangers of a pan-nationalist front were exposed in other ways. The clear conclusion was that the answer to Protestant sectarianism is Catholic unity. A moments thought will show that this can only strengthen the forces of sectarianism - not weaken them. More immediately it leaves Sinn Fein trapped in negotiations with

the sectarians under the tutelage of the SDLP in an attempt to defuse the next flashpoint - the August 10th march by the apprentice boys in Derry. This is a no-win situation. Either the "boys" march with Sinn Fein support or they oppose the march with the political basis eroded by their participation in the negotiations.

THE DOG THAT DIDN'T BARK

The dog that didn't bark in the midst of this crisis was the Irish trade union movement. It has a policy of opposing sectarianism and has organised mass protests in the recent past. But the mass protests, in the tradition of a right-wing leadership, were pro-imperialist and aimed at the breaking of the republican cease-fire. The anti-sectarian policy is operated at a strictly local level and based on theories of conflict resolution. When the real mainspring of sectarian division raises its head the most that these cravens can do is issue a weak protest about the intimidation of health workers. Yet the opportunity was there. There was quite strong opposition to the use of force by orangism within the unionist community. This was weakened by the Orange victory and the effective endorsement of the British, but a debate continues. An intervention by the trade union movement, drawing a line in the sand between trade unionism and membership of sectarian organisations, would have seriously weakened the orange forces. Given that they represent Irish workers as a whole rather than the fraction within the partitioned state they remain vulnerable to attack on this issue, even more so at a time when their policies of economic collaboration with the Dublin government are coming under attack in the South. It's this possibility that offers a real alternative to the pan-nationalist alliance and it is a major task of socialists in the coming period to expose the many betrayals of the trade union leadership and organise the most class-conscious forces within the unions.

The siege of Drumcree was an historic turning point. It is not the beginning of the end but it may be the end of the beginning in regrouping the forces supporting an Irish revolution and exposing the utter unwillingness and incapacity of imperialism and capitalism to achieve any sort of just solution. It blasted all sorts of illusions: Illusions in the reformability of Orangism. Illusions in a benign face to imperialism. Illusions in the power and influence of Irish capitalism. It must have seriously dented the militarist illusion that "we can always go back". The fact that the de-facto ceasefire in the North did not break down means that there is no going back. The fact that politically the republican leadership held their deathgrip on the hand of bourgeois nationalism means that there is no going back for them either.

It will take time for these lessons to be absorbed by working people. The May elections, which set up an embryo assembly, saw a massive turnout by nationalist workers and the biggest ever vote for Sinn Fein. There were mass illusions in the peace process and mass expectations. Much of the anger expressed on the streets was based on the dashing of expectations. Now there is a great deal of cynicism, but given Sinn Fein's commitment to the game of diplomacy with Irish capitalism and the absence of any real alternative within republicanism the focus for the immediate future will remain a new peace process. The British hope that disillusion will gradually turn to demoralisation, but life is unlikely to run that smoothly for them.

For Marxists the lesson is stark. Before us lies the task of establishing the political independence of the Irish working class and looking to the force that it represents to resolve the democratic questions posed by the British occupation. We have one significant victory under our belt. Victory in the battle of ideas. Every test of the Irish "peace process" since the initial Hume-Adams talks has met exactly the predictions of Socialist Democracy's analysis while bourgeois, republican and other sections of the far left have foundered in confusion and contradiction. That's not enough by a long chalk to break the masses from their battered illusions in the peace process, but it may be enough to bring together those militants who can form the vanguard of a new leadership.

Drumcree was a shock. It won't be the last shock that Irish workers have to face before the present imperialist offensive is stopped in its tracks and forced back, opening up the opportunity for real peace and freedom.



Bruton: From anger to capitulation.

Union chiefs step aside from Orange Bigots

On Wednesday (31 July) a delegation of union officials from the ICTU met with the British secretary of state and asked him to set up an independent inquiry to clarify the events surrounding Drumcree and its aftermath. This sort of pathetic suggestion will of course be sniggered at by a British government that well understands that the trades union leadership is an animal without self belief. Mayhew will of course listen politely to the "concerns" of the union officials whilst finding it difficult not to break into a fit of laughter. Are the British to investigate their own state forces and the role of the state in backing up orange reaction?

What is to stop the trades union movement constituting an inquiry of its own? What is to prevent the ICTU setting up a forum to take statements from hundreds of witnesses? What is to stand in the way of the labour movement making recommendations as to how to deal with right-wing orange bigotry?

The ICTU expects nothing to come out of its meeting with the government. The union leaders are merely trying to cover over their conspicuous failure to take a stand against loyalist violence with

anything like the vigour and urgency with which they acted when the IRA cease-fire broke down. Immediately after the first IRA bombing the ICTU in the north and in the south was in the vanguard of a major campaign of condemnation and opposition. Many unions took out advertising space in the national press to denounce the IRA. They were told to "get our backs". In the south top officials like Peter Cassells clambered onto platforms to denounce violence to mass rallies organised and encouraged by the union movement. Chris Hudson, an official with the Union of Communication Workers, at one such rally demanded the reintroduction of internment for "republican scum". Leftist political currents like militant labour and socialist worker were quick to launch a national poster campaigns belting out the message of opposition to Republican violence.

It has not gone unmentioned in the homes of many working class nationalists how when a massive wave of loyalist violence broke out the same trade union leaders who stood up to oppose IRA violence failed to take action against it. The trade union leaders today are merely following a well set pattern. Previously the trade union leadership failed to get behind the

civil rights movement, did nothing to oppose the use of internment without trial, did nothing after Bloody Sunday, stood aside for the loyalists in 1974. Even when we had a cease-fire they failed to call for the end to the battery of repressive measures held onto by the state.

It is time for all those union members who oppose sectarian intimidation to take back their unions from a privileged leadership which is too tied up in government co-operation and partnership to lead workers in the fight against Orange bigotry. The mass trades union movement is potentially the strongest force for progressive change in Ireland yet it stays out of politics when it is most needed and in fact bans "political" resolutions except those framed by the leadership in support of imperialism.. The potential inherent in the labour movement will only begin to be realised when the official leadership is made up of those who reflect the class interest of the members. Ordinary union members can begin that process today by demanding that the ICTU organise a workers forum to inquire into the lessons of Drumcree as a substitute for a government inquiry which we all know would be just another white-wash.

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