

# BRITISH TROOPS



**OUT NOW!**

A row of black silhouettes of British soldiers standing in a line, each holding a rifle. They are positioned behind a banner.

**IMG Pamphlet**

**5p**

*"That the private ownership by a class of the land and instruments of production, distribution and exchange is opposed to this vital principle of justice, and is the fundamental basis of all oppression, national political and social.*

*"That the subjection of one nation to another, as of Ireland to the authority of the British crown, is a barrier to the free political and economic development of the subjected nation, and can only serve the interests of the exploiting classes of both nations."*

## INTRODUCTION

Many things have changed since James Connolly wrote the above passage in the manifesto of the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896, including the precise form of British rule of Ireland. But it is a suitable starting point for an examination of the ideas and tasks of socialists in this country who oppose the continued British domination of Ireland. It puts the central political issues very clearly.

Firstly, that for 800 years British rule of Ireland, in its various forms, has meant the continual distortion of the Irish economy in the interests of Britain – to the detriment of the vast majority of the Irish people. It is only when all forms of British influence are finally overthrown that the possibility of the full development of the Irish economy and the overcoming of divisions in the Irish working class will be realised. For us, this fundamental principle of the **right of the Irish people as a whole to self-determination** is the starting point for our understanding of the Irish situation and our duties as socialists in Britain.

Secondly, that the subjection of Ireland to Britain benefits the exploiting classes of those countries. The British working class has nothing to gain from the relationship. An integral part of the fight of the British working class to defend their living standards and to overthrow the capitalist class which has exploited them for centuries must be the support of the Irish in their fight against the same enemy. We will try to explain these two themes in turn in this short pamphlet – and show the connection between them.

## SELF DETERMINATION... TROOPS OUT NOW!

For many people it may seem strange that socialists and internationalists should support the right of nations to self-determination. Surely, we believe in an international socialist society in which individual nations and national divisions no longer exist. How then do we justify our support for Irish national independence?

In fact, socialist advance in Ireland is impossible, unless it also involves a revolution for national independence. Again Connolly expressed this idea very clearly in the ISRP manifesto: "The struggle for Irish freedom has two aspects – it is national and it is social... The Party which would lead the Irish people from bondage to freedom must then recognise both aspects of the long-continued struggle of the Irish nation."

The root of the economic backwardness of Ireland, the root of the divisions between Protestant and Catholic, the whole structure of capitalism in Ireland lie in centuries of

British rule. Socialists who champion the cause of the workers and oppressed must understand the root of that oppression. Socialists must, as Connolly did throughout his life, support every demand of the national struggle and be to the forefront in those struggles. Only in this way will they be able to demonstrate the unity of the two struggles, and bring to the fore demands and ideas which can lead to real freedom – a socialist society.

An international society will only be possible when forms of oppression are finally destroyed and this includes national oppression.

There can be no British solution in Ireland, no solution which does not begin to remove every vestige of British rule.

## SIX COUNTIES

The six county state is testimony to this position. The six county state is a completely artificial creation. It exists for one reason only: to provide a bastion to British rule in Ireland. To do this, British imperialism has bolstered the Protestant community. Through granting Loyalist control of both the means of repression and of the purse strings, a permanent majority of the six counties has been won to support of the 'imperial link'. At the same time, the material conditions have been laid for the creation of a caste in the working class and its consequent permanent division. But this loyalty of Protestant workers is bought at the expense of the exclusion of the Catholics from social and political life. The six counties is based upon the permanent denial of democratic rights, including the right to work, to the Catholic working class. Any challenge to this lowly position in which Catholic workers find themselves threatens the very existence of the state.

Even though British imperialism no longer has a direct need for the present division in Ireland, it is totally unable to do anything about it. If we look at the present situation in Ireland we see the situation nearer to civil war than at any other time in the last six years. The victory of the Loyalists in the Constitutional Convention only confirms the policy of concessions granted to the Loyalists since the Loyalist strike last year. When we say that there is no British solution, that is shown in their inability to oppose the strength of the Loyalists. But this needs to be done. Does anybody really believe that a solution can be brought about by these organisations except over the dead bodies of the Catholic working class? British troops uphold the state which guarantees these privileges. The first task for socialists in this country is to explain to British workers, fed with the daily distortions and propaganda of the press, that the ultimate responsibility for violence and sectarianism in Ireland is British responsibility and to build an awareness of that fact

and a movement in this country which fights for the ending of British rule.

Ask anyone in Andersonstown or the Falls Road what British rule means -- they'll say "the troops". Whenever British rule has been threatened, they have not hesitated to use the most brutal methods to restore "law and order". Everyone knows of the reign of terror imposed by the Black and Tans in 1920. The Whitlaws and the Reeses of that generation always explained that these methods were necessary to save the Irish from themselves. When the city of Cork was razed to the ground by the Black and Tans, Hamar Greenwood, Colonial Secretary, explained in Parliament: "it was necessary in order to save Cork from destruction."

Today it is no different. British stability in Ireland was threatened, first by the Civil Rights Movement, and then by the mass opposition of the minority spearheaded by the Provisional IRA. The response was to send in troops. The response was internment, Bloody Sunday, torture, curfews. After five years of "keeping the peace", the result is over 1,200 dead, and the extreme Orange organisations are as strong as ever. What more proof could there be that there is no British solution in Ireland?

British troops are not in Ireland to keep the peace, they are in Ireland to defend British interests and to carry out British policy. Today, even during the truce, that is still true. The Constitutional Convention is another concession to the Loyalist organisations; the army is propping up that convention. Over the last five years the sharpest point of British rule has been the bayonets of the British army. That is why, for the IMG, the fundamental principle of self-determination leads us to see the central issue around which to campaign in this country is for the immediate and total withdrawal of British troops.

We believe it is this issue which expresses most clearly the meaning of British rule of Ireland; and the clearest issue around which it will be possible to build a movement of the British working class which starts from a clear rejection of British rule.

#### THE COMMON OBJECTIVE

The commonest objection to this position is that the withdrawal of troops would lead to massive sectarian warfare in which hundreds or even thousands would be killed, and out of which Protestant rule would be re-established. Of course, this is the favourite bogey of the Wilsons and the Reeses of this world. At one level, this cry represents the typical colonial mentality that the 'natives' are incapable of governing their own lives. But it does represent a certain reality. But the truth of the matter is that the presence of the troops makes the possibility of such a bloodbath even more certain. The troops greatly strengthen the morale of the Loyalists. By defending the structure of the six county state, they are tangible evidence that the traditional way of solving their problems -- by repressing the Catholics -- is still on the cards. The obvious partisan feeling for the Loyalists plays a similar rôle.

But equally important is the rôle of the troops in smashing any self-defence organisation which the Catholics may construct. What's more the army turns a blind eye, nay, gives cover to the operation of sectarian assassins and bomb attacks which perform the same rôle as well as contributing to the demoralisation of the Catholic minority.

Add to this the political concessions which the Labour Government has granted over the past period to the Loyalists which has enormously boosted the morale of the Loyalists, not to mention the extension of the special reserves of the police and the Ulster Defence Regiment which is tantamount to putting the Loyalist sectarian gangs into uniform, and there is all the makings of a Loyalist shock force ready to launch civil war. The less successful the army is in smashing the Catholics, the more baying will become the demands and direct action sorties of these elements. The people who are paving the way to civil war are those that use troops and give ground to the Loyalists.

This, of course, is the point we should make loud and clear to all those people that are sincere in their fears about a potential bloodbath situation. There are groups and individuals who genuinely desire an independent Ireland and the ending of sectarian divisions; who understand that the rôle of the troops is an imperialist rôle; and are genuinely concerned that a rapid withdrawal could have disastrous consequences. Here we say two things: firstly, examine what the army is doing. Is the presence of the army lessening sectarian divisions or is it heightening them? What is the army doing to stop the Protestant assassination squads? Is the Constitutional Convention going to bring the unity of the Irish working class and the unification of Ireland nearer or further away? Is the army trying to stamp out the continued existence of sectarian privileges or is it defending them?

If you examine what the army is doing today, you must conclude that, at every stage and on every issue, it stands in the way of progress.

#### A DIVIDED WORKING CLASS

The point is that violence and sectarian strife are built into the six county statelet. Without a divided working class, without the privileges for the Protestants, there would be no supporters of British rule in the working class. The ideological divisions of the Irish working class between Protestant and Catholic have a real material base. So today Protestant workers in the north continue to vote for Orange bigots like Paisley and Craig. They join up with the para-military gangs. They celebrate sectarian assassinations and they brandish their sectarian conceit at every opportunity. In sum, in defence of their privileges they support the existence of a six county state which is based on the divisions in the working class.

The only way therefore to avoid a bloodbath; the only way that the sectarianism of Protestant workers will be overcome; the only way that Protestant workers will begin to look for a real alternative, is when the material base of their ideology, the six county state, is destroyed -- or there is a struggle which clearly threatens this state. This in fact has been the experience. The bringing down of Stormont, shattered the Orange monolith and we saw the emergence of a whole series of competing 'solutions': from Faulkner to Alliance, from Paisley to Craig, from UDA to UVF -- to the 57 varieties of Loyalist gangs. The possibility arose of some Protestant workers jumping over the divide. The impasse of the national struggle after the bringing down of Stormont, allowed these forces to reorganise themselves. The Loyalist General Strike took it off the agenda. But we could clearly see the potentialities.

But we in the British workers movement are not passive observers in this process. To some extent what we do in this country will decide the form and the outcome of the impending confront-

ation. and the opening up of civil war. It will be the Loyalists, in defence of their privileges, that will launch a civil war or through massive pogroms on the Catholics as in 1969, bring a massive bloodbath. Whether they launch such an attack will depend on their morale and combativity. A movement in this country in opposition to these Irish 'British' workers and their solution will be like a stab in the back. With no support from their imagined 'kith and kin' their determination to defend their privileges at the expense of the Catholics is likely to be sorely undermined, neutralising significant layers, if not actually winning them to the side of a united Ireland free from British control.

Nonetheless, even in the best possible circumstances, there will still be a section of Protestant workers who will fight to the end to defend the system of privileges they have supported for 150 years. Just as, in Britain, there are workers who support fascist organisations like the National Front, and who will fight to the death against a socialist revolution, so this is unfortunately true in Ireland.

No Socialist could ever welcome the idea of one group of workers fighting and killing another, but when have the capitalist class ever taken arms themselves? At some stage, the path to the unification of the Irish working class, divided for centuries by the deliberate "divide and rule" tactics of British imperialism, will meet opposition from sections of the Protestant working class. However undesirable, it cannot be avoided. We believe that the withdrawal of British troops and the dismantling of all aspects of British rule would, by taking away the props which have supported the Protestant ascendancy for so many years, minimise sectarian war and bloodshed.

If you are not prepared to support the call for immediate withdrawal of troops you must answer two questions. **What are the troops doing today which is helping to prevent civil war? What path do you see to socialism in Ireland that does not involve a certain level of sectarian war?**

#### **IRELAND – AN URGENT QUESTION FOR BRITISH WORKERS**

This TOM conference, because of the large number of delegates from working class organisations, is a step forward in the process of developing understanding and support from British workers. But it is equally clear that we still have a long way to go. Presumably everyone at this conference is agreed that our central task is to build a movement with real roots in trade union and Labour Party organisations which is capable of forcing a change in British policy in Ireland. We have to examine the political arguments and tactics necessary to achieve this.

Most importantly, the argument that the British working class has nothing to gain from British rule of Ireland, and that British rule can never lead to peace. It is this we have already outlined. But to reach a wide layer of workers, we have to relate our political positions to the immediate understanding and struggles of the British working class.

The capitalist world is headed for another intensive economic crisis. Unemployment in many countries is at its highest since the 30s, inflation in Britain is now around 25%. As ever, the response of the government and employers is to try to make workers and their families bear the brunt

of the crisis. In Britain, real unemployment is over a million, the press is full of speculation of massive cuts in welfare services, compulsory incomes policy, etc etc. Without a doubt, we will see countless hundreds of local struggles against redundancies, for wage rises to compensate for the rise in the cost of living and so on. A vital weapon in the bosses' armoury will be their ability to play on divisions within the workers ranks.

At Imperial Typewriters in Leicester, we saw how the existence of racism led the bulk of white workers to scab on Asians who were striking against lousy pay and conditions. There are countless examples of male workers who have refused to support women workers in the same factory who were demanding equal pay. One union fighting another, one section fighting another. The employers know how to exploit all these divisions to break the fighting unity which will be necessary for the working class to beat back the present offensive.

The issue of Ireland is just such a division, although not always so obvious. It is a breeding ground for the right wing. The National Front has offices in Belfast, and strong links with the UVF. They see the possibility of using the confusion among British workers over Ireland as a way to increase their influence. Enoch Powell returns to parliament, dressed in the clothes of the United Ulster Unionist Council. He is now the most articulate spokesman for Loyalist views. He hopes to use a base in the reactionary positions of the Protestant workers, as a spring board for his other ideas. As the situation around the Constitutional Convention unfolds, with the danger of a big increase in sectarian tension, this will be reflected in this country. As long as the trade union movement takes no clear stand and the Labour government proceeds on its present course; these fascists and extreme reactionaries will have a ready made channel for gaining influence.

But there is another side to this danger, shown by the Jenkins "anti-terrorist laws". This act is a dangerous attack on some of the most basic rights which have been won over years of struggle. And it was imposed with scarcely a whimper of opposition. Why? Because it was introduced under the guise of preventing the right to organise around the issue of Ireland. Because it enables the police to arrest Irish people and detain them for a week on "suspicion" alone. Because it gives the Home Secretary the right to deport Irish people. This highlights the dangers which flow from the lack of clear understanding of the roots of the Irish struggle.

Secondly, as we have already seen in Glasgow, the army will be used in this country against trade union activity. At Warwick University, just last week, 700 police with riot shields were sent in to "evict" 300 students, who had said they would leave the building they were occupying if more than 10 cops turned up! Overkill – a clear demonstration of military power intended to intimidate Warwick students and anyone else who might think about occupying a university... or a factory!

The British ruling class and the British army have learnt many lessons from their experiences in Ireland – the technology of repression, new and more sophisticated techniques of riot control, torture, etc. But also the politics of repression, how to use the right amount of force at the right time to achieve the maximum effect. Edward Heath said in 1970 at the United Nations that the main use of the army in the 70s would be against internal disorders. Frank Kitson and others have developed this in practice.

Under British rule we understood it (if we had happened to be there), they would understand what is happening to them & react to it.

To confront the issues at stake in the Irish struggle; and to take a clear working class standpoint — self-determination, troops out now — is an urgent task.

Before we go on to map out how we see the development of such a movement we will briefly analyse some of the other positions advanced on the left.

### THE BILL OF RIGHTS or MAKE THE UNDEMOCRATIC DEMOCRATIC

The position of the Communist Party (and the formal position of the TUC) is that we should devote our energies in this country to forcing the British government to enact a "Bill of Rights" for Northern Ireland. The purpose of such a Bill of Rights would be to outlaw discrimination and sectarianism, to end internment, to have democratic elections and so on. The conception is that if the six counties were somehow made democratic by an Act of the British parliament, then you would be able to whittle away the sectarian divisions in the North and unite the working class. Then the struggle for a united independent Ireland and socialism would begin. Meanwhile troops would be withdrawn to barracks.

This is just day dreaming. Such a Bill of Rights would confront the privileged position of the Protestants. The British army would have to enforce it **against** the Protestant Loyalists and the whole rationale of the six counties would be up for grabs. But the whole history of Ireland, especially that of the past six years argues against such an eventuality. It is to pretend that the British army is not an imperialist army, is not on the side of the capitalist class. Tell that to the Glasgow dustcart drivers!

No! The troops will not do anything that undermines British rule. They refused to move against the UWC general strike last year. They refuse to deal with the murderous Loyalist gangs. Why? Because these things are the products of the six county state itself, which it is the job of the British army to protect. A 'democratic' six counties is a contradiction in terms. The fight for democratic rights itself (and this would include any Bill of Rights) threatens the existence of the six county state. Insofar as a Bill of Rights is a fight for democratic rights, it poses immediately the re-unification of Ireland and national liberation. The only time that the army and the British ruling class would agree to such a thing was when it had been **defeated** in Ireland and 'stabbed in the back' at home through a massive movement demanding its withdrawal. This is the way that things happened in Mozambique. This is the way that things happened in Vietnam.

If any socialist had proposed a Bill of Rights in Vietnam which the American army was supposed to enforce, they would have been laughed out of court. The only people putting forward this nonsense were the backers of the ruling class themselves — as a cover for their continued oppression of the Vietnamese people. It is the backers of imperialism in Ireland that are beginning to take up this call today.

All this applies to the expected position of the army in the event of the withdrawal of troops to barracks. The backbone of the British army would be the Catholic minority placed in a position to emerge from the barracks to defend the Catholics from sectarian attack. But this could only occur, as we have explained in other ways, if the six county state was completely stabilised. But that could only be if there was no movement for democratic rights in the six counties. Because the demand of democratic rights challenges the very foundations of the six county state. In defence of the six county state, the army has no option, even if it wanted to, of putting down those people challenging the state i.e. those fighting for democratic rights and national unification and independence — the Catholic minority. Consequently, anyone that limits their demands to 'back to barracks' is laying the basis for a counter attack by the troops after a victorious upsurge of the minority had put them there. For what would the army be doing between now and when it is finally withdrawn? It would continue to permit and **defend** the existing institutions.

For all of these arguments the same point holds. We do not accept that the army — which has always been the ultimate guarantor or British power in Ireland and the most direct agent of oppression in Ireland — can ever play a progressive role in Ireland. As we have emphasised throughout the interests of Britain and the interests of the Irish people are irreconcilably opposed, and no solution or formula can overcome this antagonism. The only way forward in Ireland lies through the complete removal of all British influence — and let's start by building a campaign for immediate and unconditional withdrawal of troops.

Finally, there are those, such as Leo Abse, who support the call for the withdrawal of troops but who do so for significantly different reasons. There are some who combine it with the call for a 'repartition' of Ireland, leaving four counties; or who explain their position in terms of getting the army out, for the army's sake; or some who want to see the continued existence of the six counties.

The growth in support of such positions, starting with the petition organised by Peggy Chaston in 1972 increased sharply after the Loyalist strike. These positions do not clearly support the right of self-determination and reject the possibility of any British solution. They are a product of the acute crisis of British strategy in Ireland, and an inability to see any British way forward. These currents will prove to be very fickle allies of the Troops Out Movement. Any new developments could lead them to change their positions completely. If the TOM is to succeed in the project of building a mass movement, then it must be based on firm political ground.

What attitude should we take to these currents? Are we prepared to work with them? We think that future developments in Ireland, and the enormous possibilities for winning working class support for the positions of the TOM will give us ample opportunity to demonstrate the impossibility of any British solution and to win our argument with these currents. Therefore the TOM should be prepared to hold joint platforms and common activities with them, with one condition. The task of the TOM is not to provide platforms for this or that opportunist who is trying to jump on a bandwagon. As long as we see that they are conducting a serious and public fight within their own organisations to win working class support for the demand of troop withdrawal; as long as the effect of their actions, whatever their own intentions, moves in the direction we want to go, then we should

be prepared to work with them in all suitable ways. But, of course, there can never be any question of the TOM changing its political positions to accommodate to anyone, or participating in any action that does not clearly nail the responsibility for violence in Ireland firmly on the British door.

#### **FORWARD FROM THE CONFERENCE -- TOWARDS A MASS CAMPAIGN**

We have argued that the IMG's positions and the positions of the TOM provide the correct basis from which to build a campaign. The question then is how?

The wide support for this conference demonstrates that these political positions are beginning to take hold in the working class organisations. We call on all organisations to give clear support to, and participate in the TOM and all its activities.

The task from this conference is to mount a campaign in every locality to win support from TU branches, LP organisations, as well as students unions and all political and community organisations to win support for these demands.

Since the Loyalist strike, the Labour government has operated without any clear longterm direction. They have been living from hand to mouth, trying to win away some of the base of the Loyalist organisations by giving concessions to Loyalism, and to break the resistance of the IRA and the Catholic community. Their vain hope was to build support for the "moderates" like Brian Faulkner (the man who introduced internment) and recreate some sort of power-sharing block. They have failed completely in that as the election results show. This has two consequences, firstly the confidence and morale of the Loyalist organisations has been maintained because of the continuous concessions; and secondly, the absence of any clear strategy now shows, leaving the Labour government with its trousers down, displaying its orange underwear.

The British ruling class faces a growing political crisis -- deepening tensions in the Labour Party, rapidly escalating economic crisis, most importantly, no clear consensus in any of the capitalist parties on a strategy to confront and attack the strength of the working class. Into this crisis on the home front, we must insert the crisis facing their Irish policy. Sections of the Labour Party are becoming more and more disillusioned with the situation; and of course a number of Labour MPs have sponsored this conference; there are signs that the Tory party may break with the bipartisan policy and come out for full capitulation to the Loyalists.

Doubtless Merlyn Rees will soon be gracefully retired, having done a "good job in difficult circumstances". We can expect that during the time of the Constitutional Convention we will see more masterful inactivity, combined with behind the scene manoeuvres. At some stage the British government has got to make a choice between the various options -- handover to the Loyalists, moves towards integration, attempts to withdraw leaving things in the hands of the Southern government, etc.

Throughout the period of the convention, we will have greater opportunities to expose the various myths which

the press and government have peddled. We must use the daily events in Ireland to explain time and time again that the six county state is, and always will be, a sectarian state; the reactionary nature of the Loyalist organisations; the sectarian policies of the army. All these emphasise the impossibility of a British solution via the Convention.

When the Loyalists begin to spell out their demands, and the British government is forced towards a clear choice; we can expect that the possibility of explaining our ideas on a wide scale in this country will be increased.

These political possibilities have to be linked into the arguments above explaining why it is vital for the British working class to take a clear stand on the Irish question.

The crisis of British strategy in Ireland; the clear Loyalist domination of the Convention; and the deteriorating economic situation in this country point the way. From this conference we can move forward to make the projected rally in October the biggest and most significant event in this country since Direct Rule.

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