

METROPOLITAN POLICE

(COPY)

Special Report

SPECIAL BRANCH

SUBJECT

Socialist Workers Party

Reference to Papers

100/77/238

19 78

... 7th day of February ...

1. The following information has been received from a reliable source...

2. On Saturday 28 January 1978 between 11.30am and 5pm at the North London Polytechnic, Holloway Road, N7, a day school on the subject of 'Ireland' was held by the Irish sub-committee of the Socialist Workers Party. About eighty persons were present at the morning session, which was chaired by Gerry FITZPATRICK, and about fifty at the afternoon one which was chaired by Steve BERRY.

3. FITZPATRICK opened the morning session by introducing the first speaker, Eamon McCANN, who gave a long history of Irish politics from Cromwellian times to the present day. It was full of McCANN's usual anti-British rhetoric and he finished his speech with an impassioned criticism of Roy Mason and the British troops serving in Northern Ireland. He called on all revolutionaries in this country to give unqualified support to the Provisional IRA which was proving itself to be the only effective anti-imperialist force on either side of the border in Ireland.

4. McCANN's speech was followed by a few questions which were not of particular interest. FITZPATRICK then introduced the next speaker, Paul O'BRIEN of the Socialist Workers Movement (the Irish counterpart of the Socialist Workers Party). He gave a short speech which contained many economic details of the present situation in Eire. He also said that there had been a new party formed there called the Socialist Labour Party, whose members were made up from breakaway left-wing Fianna Fail and various other left-wing groups. O'BRIEN continued that the Socialist Workers Movement had decided to join this party and canvass other groups for suggestions as to its policies. He came in for heavy criticism from the floor on this point with many saying that revolutionary politics should be conducted within the working class and not within some broad front non-revolutionary party. O'BRIEN pointed out, however, that with a total membership of just over fifty in Eire it was difficult for the SWM voice to be heard and they had decided that to join the Socialist Labour Party would give them more publicity and perhaps more members.

5. O'BRIEN's speech was followed by one from a member of the Independent Socialist Party, which, informed the audience, was a breakaway group from the ISOP

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(Irish Republican Socialist Party) working in Ulster. He said that it was tremendously difficult for a revolutionary socialist to work within the framework of religious bigotry in Northern Ireland and that the trade unionists there did not want to listen to socialists but rather to their religious leader. Continuing, he said that he and Bernadette McALLISNEY had tried to start a mass workers' movement by forming the Relatives Aid Committee, which aimed to help the families of Northern Irish prisoners. There had been a conference recently at Coalisland attended by over 700 people including members of the SDLP, Sinn Fein, DUP, Privacy (own party) and protestant organizations. The conference had donated £50 to the striking firemen and there had been a good atmosphere throughout. He hoped that it was the start of a proper workers' movement in Ulster.

6. There followed a few questions to the evening's speakers, two of which was of interest. After a short break for lunch, Steve F O'Neil took over the chair and introduced Tony CLIFF who gave a short speech to start the post-prandial discussion. He began by saying that the revolutionary movement in this country had much for which to thank Ireland; particularly to James CONNOLLY for his writings and actions. It was from him that the idea of rank and file organizations had sprung and for this idea alone the SWP was in his debt. CLIFF continued that it was time that revolutionary groups, both here and in Ireland, returned to the ideals of CONNOLLY and recognize the Irish struggle as a class struggle and not merely an anti-British and Troops Out of Ireland campaign. The IRA had alienated British working class support by setting off bombs in London and Birmingham thereby killing British workers. He thought that they had now seen their error and hoped there would be no further attacks on the mainland. CLIFF then turned to the Coalisland conference. The donation from the conference - made up of mainly catholic workers - to the firemen who were mainly protestant, was the best news he had heard from Ireland for years. It was a classic example of workers' solidarity in a difficult political climate.

7. Following CLIFF's speech there was an animated discussion among those present. Eamonn McCANN accused CLIFF of not facing reality because the Provos were the only effective anti-imperialist force and it was useless to withhold support until they joined the SWP. CLIFF replied that he did not mean that the Provisionals should not be supported - all revolutionaries should support national liberation movements fighting imperialism - but there was no fault in pointing out where a movement was going wrong, while still showing support for it.

8. After further lengthy contributions from the floor,



BERRY handed over the chair to FITZPATRICK who made a short speech on the tasks facing the SWP in relation to Ireland. He said that there would be a new pamphlet out shortly called 'The British Problem in Ireland' and written by Steve BERRY. He encouraged members to sell this pamphlet on a large scale as it stated the SWP position, as explained by CLIFF, in full. Turning to the International Tribunal on Britain's Presence in Ireland, [Privacy] said he wanted as many trade unionists as possible to give evidence to this Tribunal.

9. CLIFF summed up the day's proceedings before the day school was terminated at 5pm."

10. The following persons were identified as being present:-

- Steve BERRY 402/ [Privacy]
- Jerry FITZPATRICK 402/ [Privacy]
- Tony CLIFF 408/56/38, [Privacy]
- [Privacy] Mention re S [Privacy]
- Paul O'BRIEN 402/ [Privacy]
- Bonnie McCANN 402/ [Privacy]
- [Privacy] Unable to identify
- [Privacy]
- [Privacy]
- [Privacy]
- [Privacy]
- [Privacy]

Mentioned: Bernadette McALISNEY



[Signature]
Inspector

[Signature]
A'CHILL SUPERVISOR

THE PRESENT SITUATION

The main thrust of British policy in Northern Ireland over the last few years has been to force some form of power sharing on the province. The idea was to bind both communities to continued British rule by isolating the 'men of violence' on both sides and winning over the middle class representatives. The policy has never been easy to implement. Both communities seeing their respective paramilitary organisations as necessities. The inhabitants of the Catholic ghettos have never been convinced that power sharing will actually give them the power to end the discrimination and sectarianism. Similarly Protestants haven't been keen to make any concessions to Catholics seeing this as the first step in the destruction of the statelet of Northern Ireland.

While on the one hand the velvet glove was wooing the middle class politicians the iron fist on the other hand was crushing all opposition. On occasion the iron fist was used against those Protestants who while welcoming continued British rule weren't keen on the particular form with the concessions to the Catholic middle class. The iron fist has been used most however, against those who are opposed to any form of British rule. Thus over the last few years the daily harassment and intimidation of the Catholic ghettos has been stepped up. Turf Lodge was for instance, occupied by the British Army last August who then proceeded to ransack homes and battering anyone they could lay their hands on. The passing of more, repressive legislation, has allowed the Army and RUC to increase the number of suspects picked up. Allegations of the RUC using torture at Castlereagh barracks are widespread, and many are from non-republican sources. The severest repression has been reserved for those actually fighting against the British presence with the British Army's dirty tricks department, the SAS.

By the end of 1977 Roy Mason, the Northern Ireland Secretary, began to boast that the situation was finally almost under control. He pointed to the splits in the Loyalist bloc following the May strike. He also went on to claim that the IRA had little support left in the ghettos, and had been beaten militarily. A look at the declining number of violent incidents gave credence to his claims.

Mason had, however, like many previous Northern Ireland secretaries, misjudged the situation.

It was true that the last Loyalist strike had revealed splits amongst the leaders of the Protestant community. People like Craig were willing to agree with the British ruling class that it was worth making a few concessions to the Catholic middle class as long as these didn't fundamentally change things. More hard-liners like Paisley weren't prepared to make any concessions. Mason's mistake was to identify a split in the leadership with a split in the rank and file. Most Protestant workers, while not hardline Paisleyites, shared many of his worries about concessions of any sort being the thin end of the wedge. If Catholics were to get more jobs and houses, they had to come from somewhere and the Protestant working class was the most likely target. Protestant workers were not prepared to surrender their marginal privileges and be reduced to the level suffered by the Catholic working class.

Similarly, Mason mistook the general war weariness of the Catholic ghettos and the aftermath of the Peace Movement as a turn away from the IAR. He thought that his strategy of branding Republicans as 'common criminals' and 'gangsters', rather than liberators, was actually working. Whilst it was true that many Catholics were disgusted by some of the IRA's acts, they still looked to them as their own means of defence against the Army

and the sectarian thugs. The Provisional IRA do have a certain amount of popular support in the Catholic ghettos and will continue to do so whilst there is a need for the ghettos to defend themselves.

Mason's misreading of the situation led him to have another go at wooing the middle class politicians. So talks were set up between the Unionists and the SDLP to discuss devolved administration - the idea being to give the middle class representatives control over local government whilst leaving things such as security in Westminster's hands. Mason believed that having isolated the 'men of violence', he could now proceed to convince the middle class politicians that the new form of rule envisaged by the British government would in the long run serve both their interests.

The extent of Mason's mistake was revealed in mid January when the Loyalists walked out of the talks. They used the radio interview given by Jack Lynch, the Southern Prime Minister, as their excuse. In reality, however, they had long been looking for a way out as they realised the lack of support amongst their own followers.

January also demonstrated that Mason had seriously underestimated the capacity of the Provos to continue waging the struggle against the British presence. The Provos decided to show Mason they were anything but dead and embarked on a whole series of bombings and shootings.

By the end of January, British policy is no further advanced. It still hasn't found a way of selling some form of 'power sharing' to both communities. It is still groping for the right words to make power sharing palatable to Catholics without unduly antagonising Protestants.

In reality all British political solutions are doomed as all regard the continued existence of the 6 county statelet as sacrosanct. As long as Ireland remains divided and as long as Britain remains in Ireland, there will always be reasons for Irish men and women to resort to gun and bomb. If Britain no longer props up the artificial Northern statelet with 15,000 troops, then the Irish people would be able to determine their own future, and there would be a possibility of a united Ireland. Only in such a united Ireland free from British interference will it be possible to remove the basis of religious bigotry, and put an end to the violence. The present British policy involves trying to reform the unreformable and can never work. In the vacuum created by the absence of any political solution, British policy will simply drift to its usual Irish policy - repression and yet more repression. This in turn will breed more resistance, and so the war will continue. The only way Britain can solve the 'Irish Problem' is to withdraw so that the Irish people are free to mend the injuries and divisions caused by centuries of British interference.

The British government withdrew political status from Irish prisoners after 1st. of March 1976. After this date people suspected of 'terrorist type' offences were to be tried in front of no jury courts as common criminals. This was all part of the British government's policy of branding those fighting against the British presence as gangsters. The compound system used in Long Kesh was to be phased out and replaced by isolated cells. Prisoners would be forced to wear prison clothing and co-operate with prison routine. In other words the prisoners, a symbol of the resistance to British rule were to be forced to admit that their actions had not been politically motivated, just criminal.

The first prisoner to be denied political status was Kieran Nugent. He insisted that he was a political prisoner and refused to wear prison clothes. He has since been joined by over 150 other prisoners. The penalty for non-co-operation is severe. Most of the prisoners are held in the special H Block of Long Kesh. They are held in solitary confinement for 24 hours a day, and having refused prison clothes are kept naked except for a blanket. During the day their beds are removed, leaving only a chair in their unheated cells. They are deprived of all privileges, receive no parcels or letters denied reading material, and not allowed their right to a monthly visit. They also lose their chance of gaining remission on their sentences. Republicans have been locked away by no jury courts because of the role they have played in the fight against the British presence in Ireland. It is this presence which is the root cause of the present 'troubles' in Northern Ireland. As long as Britain remains in Ireland there will be no peace. It is up to us as British Trade Unionists and socialists to force the British government to withdraw from Ireland so that the Irish people can decide their own future free from British guns. It is up to us to put an end to the conditions that drive ordinary Irish men and women to resort to acts of violence in retaliation for centuries of British violence. Then it is up to us to expose the real culprits. We must recognise that the Irish people have a right to fight back against the British army of occupation, and defend them in that fight. We might not like the methods they choose to retaliate with but have no right to criticise them while we do nothing to end their suffering and exploitation.

P.T.O.

Karl Marx once wrote, 'That a nation that enslaves another can never itself be free! These words are still true today. As long as British capital oppresses and exploits Irish workers it will continue to exploit British workers.

While Irish political prisoners languish in British jails Britains name will be as notorious as the names of Chile and South Africa. The Republican prisoners have by their gallant resistance continued to be a part of the struggle to end the British presence in Ireland. They deserve the support of every socialist and Trade Unionist.
