

THE ANGLO-IRISH AGREEMENT , SECTARIANISM AND WORKERS UNITY

A discussion paper by the Ballymena Anarchist Group (Anarcho - Syndicalist)

September '86

Contents:

- 1/ A background to the 'agreement',U.S. involvement.
- 2/ Loyalist opposition.
- 3/ The 'strategy of tension',sectarian murders,intimidation,the Unionists.
- 4/ The role of the 'security forces'.
- 5/ Workers Unity and the National Question.
- 6/ Conclusion.

Since the signing of the 'Anglo-Irish Agreement' in November 1985,the problems in the North of Ireland have catapulted to the head of British and European news.The vision of equal rights and equal status for the nationalist communities and the idea that finally loyalist 'supremacy' was about to be broken by the 'determination' of the British and Irish governments was presented by the worlds media.

The promise of multi-million dollar aid from the USA was the bait used to try and bring the political (sectarian) representatives round the table for talks on the new 'non discriminating Ireland'.

The 'Agreement' was to be the great peace maker in Ireland,all manner of wide ranging reforms were envisaged,the ending of the supergrass system,a system where the courts can convict on the uncorroberated evidence of a paid police informer.The ending of the 'Diplock courts',where the supergrass trials are conducted;without a jury.The repeal of the 'flags and emblems' act,which makes it a criminal offence to display in any way the southern national flag.And probably the most contentious of all the 'proposed' reforms,was the re-routing of loyalist parades away from nationalist areas.

All these reforms,or more correctly,talk of reforms,were designed to quell any opposition to the deal from the nationalist communities while at the same time they would provoke a loyalist reaction.A loyalist reaction that would force them out onto the streets to 'defend Ulster from republicanism',a reaction that would signal the beginning of a war of attrition by Britain against militant loyalism and hopefully lead to an isolation of the most militant sections of the loyalist communities and develop a new 'loyalist realism', that must accept the deal or dissappear.

The reforms themselves were never designed to be implemented,they were the carrot held constantly out of reach by the hand of the British and Irish governments. Had they been implemented they would have undermined the security policies of both governments,Ireland has its own special,non jury courts for 'terrorist' suspects, it has its own form of the PTA (Prevention of Terrorism Act) which allows them to detain without charge suspects for up to seven days.

At the time of writing not one single reform has been witnessed,the so-called 'framework for peace' has resulted in the sectarian murders of 8 workers 7 of them catholic workers murdered by loyalist paramilitaries,it has further polarised the two communities,increased sectarian tension and bitterness and not suprisingly led to an increase in the numbers and the viciousness of the 'security-forces' on the streets of the North.

..... cont'

..... Since the agreement hasn't brought about the peace and reconciliation that it was supposed to, then what was the real purpose behind the signing of the 'Anglo-Irish Accord'. To find out the real reasons it is necessary to look at the economic and political aspirations of the British and Irish governments and the relationship between these and the economic and military imperialism of the U.S.A.

For the Irish government the deal would be the beginning of the end of the political instability in Ireland. So anxious were they to make political capital from the agreement that they formally recognised the existence of the 6 county state for the first time since the partition of Ireland. Their desire to crush the I.R.A. and all forms of militant republicanism which stood in the way of a peaceful, profitable and 'moderate' Ireland.

The British government on the other hand, no longer able to make profits in the north of Ireland and unable to solve the problems there, needed the consent of the Irish government publicly, to the handing over of northern Ireland via the agreement. For them it would be the end of a historical embarrassment, the plugging of a financial wound that has seen millions poured into a Vietnam type situation and a chance, when the long hoped for stability comes, to re-exploit the Irish working class without the difficulty of governing them at the same time.

The quiet partner in the deal has been the U.S.A. who have been pushing for just such a deal between Britain and Ireland for some time. The U.S. has considerable financial interests in Ireland, mainly in new technologies, well over 70% of the industry in Ireland is U.S. or British owned and controlled. Its not surprising therefore that the U.S. should wish to protect these interest. Ireland is one of the very few 'neutral' countries in western europe, the U.S. is applying considerable force (read financial incentive) for Ireland to become a NATO member. Such a move would be of invaluable strategic importance to the U.S.

This relationship couldn't be more graphically illustrated than in the battles by President Reagan to get the extradition of Irish 'terrorist' suspects passed by the senate and by his equally strenuous efforts to block the flow of funds to the IRA from the Irish American group NORAIID. At the same time the Irish government was bending over backwards to try and help the British government gain the extradition of 'terrorist' suspect Evlyn Glenholmes to face trial in Britain. Also the Irish governments pledge to stamp out the IRA along the border, while the British government pretends to be 'dealing with the loyalists' in the north, so that at least the situation looks balanced to the public and the media.

All this shows only too clearly the real reasons behind the agreement, that it was designed in the interests of British and American, economic and military imperialism and the economic and political gains of the Irish government and Irish middle classes.

Loyalist opposition to the 'Anglo Irish Deal' is not merely a campaign to remain British by the 1 million so-called 'loyalists', because they don't want to pay higher car insurance, or face a lower standard of living, if that was all it was then some healthy 'counter information' would soon straighten things out. The opposition runs much deeper than that and is a lot more difficult to counter, it is not simply a matter of convincing people by better arguments, if only it were..... To try and point out why there is such fervent and bitter opposition to the 'deal' it is necessary to look at a very brief history of loyalism and then try to show from that the position of loyalists today..

The approximately 1 million people in the north of Ireland who are labelled as 'loyalists' are the direct or indirect descendants of the mass influx of English and Scottish presbyterians into the north east of Ireland from the late 1600's and the 1700's. They were the tenant farmers and small landlords given the land by a benevolent England to produce for the new army of workers of the ensuing Industrial Revolution in Britain, Ireland became 'the bread basket' of England. This period of Irish history known as the plantations resulted in the uprooting of thousands of the native inhabitants of the areas now under British rule and reduced them to nothing more than land slaves of the new petite bourgeoisie. This was the birth of loyalist domination in Ulster and it survives intact today, through the period of the 'partition' of Ireland and through the 'civil rights' campaigns of the mid 60's and early 70's, when the catholic working class were struggling for the right to 'one person, one vote', and an end to the gerrymandering of the unionist dominated government.

Loyalism has survived because it was created by Britain as a weapon to divide the Irish working class. Britain used sectarianism to protect its assets in the North of Ireland, the largest linen producing area in the world at the turn of the century, one of the largest shipbuilding and engineering areas in the world and in the rest of the country, the 'bread basket' that fed the industrial workers of Britain. The ruling classes brought in the 'bogy' of the catholic after the loyalist job and nurtured sectarianism in Ireland. The workers of the north were taught to identify their interests with their religion rather than their class, as long as they remained loyal to King and country (and the bosses) they were guaranteed a job, a home and a decent wage and above all the right to 'first class' citizenship. In the North of Ireland sectarianism became an institution protected by the loyalist government and advanced in the 'orange' organisations, organisations where the workers sat side by side with their bosses, marched with them, they and the bosses were one.

The nature of the state of the north of Ireland surrounded as it is by the catholic republic of Ireland has resulted in a centuries old paranoia among the loyalists. They view themselves as the modern day equivalent of the early christians, persecuted by the majority and always under threat, the 'siege mentality'. Loyalists do not believe that catholics are victimised or discriminated against, they think of them as 'scroungers', 'layabouts', and worse, they are the same arguments used by the fascists in Britain against Asians and Blacks and they are the same arguments used by Hitler and the fascist in Germany in the run up to the war. Loyalists believe that far from the terms of the 'anglo-irish deal' being a leveller that would result in the same levels of discrimination for all, they see the terms of that deal, or for that matter, any compromise to nationalists, resulting in 'catholic rule'. That they would find themselves a small minority in the land persecuted and discriminated against by the majority, in fact exactly what the nationalist community have been subjected to for the last three centuries. These are the seeds of loyalist bitterness and reaction to the ideas of the agreement, and it is nothing more than a reaction to ideas, because so far nothing in the deal has been implemented.

To many people in the loyalist communities there is no hatred of the nationalists and for that section of the loyalist community it is quite simply a question of counter information, this group is a perfect example of people all from loyalist backgrounds who have turned to anarcho syndicalism and have rejected the 'ideology' of loyalism.

The loyalist methods of making the 'Anglo Irish Accord' unworkable began shortly after the signing of the agreement back in Nov' '85. The council boycott by all the unionist councillors, the Westminster parliament boycott by the unionist M.P's, the mass rallies in Belfast and the 'Ulster Says No' campaign all were united by one common factor, failure. They all failed to achieve anything, the 'Ulster says No' campaign was furthered recently by 'reminders'... 'Ulster STILL says No ', obviously just in case anyone had forgotten! Withholding rent and rates payments was looked at until the unionists remembered that an act now exists (which they cried out for during the rent strikes by nationalist over the country during the early 70's) which allows the housing authority to debit the rent at the source of income if necessary. The early campaigns had another uniting factor in that at least they were primarily directed against the British and Irish Governments as the implementers of the agreement.

Yet again, however, the loyalist reaction to the agreement has turned into a reactionary onslaught against the catholic working class as the easy target for their frustration and hatred. So far since the beginning of July there have been 8 sectarian murders, 7 of those by the loyalist paramilitaries and the latest one by the I.R.A. of what they called a 'legitimate target' was a 22 year old electrician looks ominously like the beginning of the tit for tat sectarian killings that were the hallmark of the mid 70's. It is the beginning of the 'strategy of tension', a plan to increase the amount of sectarian killings in the hope of just such the reaction that the Provos provided, sectarian tension spirals and that's another nail in the coffin of the 'Anglo Irish Accord'.

The intimidation campaigns by both the loyalists and the IRA have meant that in theory no worker is safe from the possibility of being the target of either of the wings of reaction. The loyalists have said that their list includes those who buy or sell the Sinn Fein paper 'Republican News', or anyone that uses the cities 'Black Taxis', any known republican or republican sympathiser, the list is almost endless. On the other hand the provos have said those that have any links with the 'security - forces', those working with them, for them, supplying them or having even the most tenuous of links would be considered a target. With the average unemployment in the North running at about 30% many people who are at risk just cannot afford to give up their jobs. Such is the renewed threat to Jobs in the province that the ICTU, (Irish Congress of Trade Unions,) which stands well to the right of the British TUC has been compelled to issue statements on sectarianism and is to openly give advice at its union centres, this may not sound like much, but for the ICTU to even recognise that there is a 'political situation' in Ireland then the situation must be grave.

The unionist politicians, particularly those of the DUP, (Democratic ? Unionist Party) like Paisley and his deputy Peter Robinson have publicly distanced themselves from those who carried out the murders of 7 catholic workers. In reality the wave of sectarian murders is all part of their strategy to make the agreement unworkable. Both of them have very strong links with the UVF and the UDA the two largest of the loyalist paramilitary organisations and through them have not so public links with the British National Front. The 'two pronged' assault on the agreement which together both the loyalist paramilitaries and the likes of the DUP have launched on the agreement included the sectarian killings as a method of provoking a reaction from the republican paramilitaries which would result in an outcry from the 'ordinary' loyalist who would show their solidarity to the Paisley's and the loyalist paramilitaries as the 'protectors of the faith and of loyalism'. So far their 'strategy' hasn't been of any great success. As we will see in a later section the workers of the north haven't let sectarianism drive a wedge between them and some sections are fighting back.

One of the key areas of the agreement has been the Irish governments pledge to force Britain to adopt a non sectarian security policy. This pledge included the recruitment of more catholics into the RUC and the eventual disbanding of the UDR. At present the RUC has only 6% of its members from the nationalist communities, the UDR stopped giving figures for catholic enrolment once the percentage figures went below 5%. These figures make a mockery of the much talked about 'balance' within the security forces, the UDR which was formed at the beginning of the troubles as an Ulster regiment of the British army was made up almost exclusively of the disbanded B. Specials who quite simply were a legalised sectarian paramilitary organisation. The UDR have been involved in 7 murders (these are only ones committed which weren't authorised) of catholics which were committed by either off duty members or in the most recent example on duty soldiers who changed into civilian clothing in the back of their landrover, murdered a young catholic and used the cover of being 'on duty'.

What this points to is that a non sectarian security policy is impossible with a clearly sectarian 'security force' enforcing it. The events since the beginning of period since the agreement was signed only further demonstrate this. The classic example was the March 3rd loyalist one day strike, the world was told that the strike was a great success, mass intimidation of workers, province wide road blocks were responsible for bringing the province to a standstill. What wasn't clearly shown was that no military was used to break up the illegal road blocks, that the RUC stood by and watched catholic and protestant workers being intimidated by sectarian thugs that at no stage did they attempt to intervene, they allowed a factory in portadown to be burnt down while the workers were still inside and only stepped in to evacuate them when the crowd of loyalists allowed them. In areas like Ballymena and the rural areas surrounding it, the police didn't even bother to turn out at the barricades. Not suprisingly the march 3rd strike was viewed as a success by the media, if it had been a 'general strike' by catholic workers the story would have been very different, the behaviour of the police wouldn't have been quite so reticent, or like the behaviour of the police at the picket line on the UNI-PORK factory in Portadown a couple of months earlier when they attacked a peaceful picket with truncheons and landrovers, injuring several pickets.

The antics of the RUC since the strike only further reinforce the arguments, the almost countless cases of loyalist intimidation of catholics in their homes, many have been petrol bombed out of their homes, the so-called 're routing' of the twelfth of July parades from one nationalist area of Portadown to another just around the corner, it was called a compromise ?

The governments strategy with the RUC depends upon the success of their strategy on the unionists. If the government can isolate the unionist in their war of attrition against them then the RUC can be used with more success against a section of the loyalist population of Ulster that 'no decent unionist would want to be seen with'.

The talk of mass resignations within the ranks of the RUC at the beginning of the year has ceased and the latest news from the police is that like any police force worldwide, they are first and foremost mercenary class traitors, all other considerations come second. The RUC are becoming increasingly isolated within their communities, the fact that once you could have walked around Belfast and then around some rural town and seen the difference between policing with consent and a police force of occupation isn't quite so clearly definable now.

The RUC are central to the success of the 'Anglo-Irish Deal', they are the tool that the British and Irish governments are using to wear down militant loyalism. They will remain a sectarian police force, but that is a small matter in the minds of the two Governments, what matters is that the siege mentality develops within the RUC and makes them a reliable force to use against the loyalists.

The British army have not been used against the loyalists, there numbers were increased during the first days of the agreement as a safety device in case the RUC failed to live up to expectations as mercenaries first, loyalists second, in the event they were not needed.

..... continued

.....The use of the British army to enforce the deal is extremely unlikely as it would signal the death of the Agreement as far as the British government is concerned. The British are trying slowly to move out of Ireland and can't afford to involve the British army as an army of occupation in loyalist areas as well as nationalist areas. Although the army was used as a back up in Portadown during the strike they haven't been used in any confrontation with loyalists since.

If however, the loyalist campaign returns to the street and its direction is against the RUC and Britain instead of the ordinary catholic worker then there is a possibility of the British army being thrown into the conflict. The UDR are an unreliable force as far as countering loyalism, so far they have not been used in the conflict with the loyalists and there is absolutely no possibility of it. In the town of Ballymoney in north Antrim, after catholic families were burnt out of their homes some of those arrested, and immediately set free were UDR soldiers.

What it comes down to is the reliability of the RUC to be anti loyalist, which to a certain extent they have proved they are capable of. But we are talking about a very specific loyalism, the militant loyalism of the Paisleys and the UDAs' who have been as forthcomming with anti RUC propaganda as they have with anti catholic propaganda. The RUC are still a sectarian force and will remain so.

'Workers Unity' is seen as the answer to achieving any permanent and peaceful solution to the problems in the north of Ireland. Workers Unity and ultimately, a libertarian socialist society are the long term objectives, but how realistic is it given that there is no unified working class in Ireland ?

We believe that a call for workers unity alone is as pointless as a call for 'Troops out' alone. Both these calls are as important as each other. We believe that first and foremost is the withdrawal of the British state from Ireland with it will go the whole basis of protestant supremacy, but at the same time this could create a volatile and dangerous situation in the north of Ireland and it is because of this that we believe a united workers organisation must be constructed today. We believe that such an organisation would be capable of defending the working class from the sectarianism of the entrenched loyalists in the north and would be a force to counter the nationalism of the IRA, Sinn Fein etc.

To talk of a 'unified workers organisation' when there is no significant non sectarian force in the north of Ireland is obviously premature, but it is very much a realistic objective. In the past in Ireland protestant and catholic workers have overcome sectarian divisions and united to defeat the bosses, the wave of strikes in Belfast in 1907 saw workers from both sides of the religious divide unite against low wages, long hours and horrendous working conditions. More recently the 'Better life for all campaign' in the mid seventies brought workers from both sides together in Belfast and Derry for better conditions for all workers. In Newry in 1976 thousands of workers took to the streets to voice their opposition and disgust at the wave of sectarian killings that had resulted in the deaths of 13 workers in less than a week. And again in the latest wave of sectarian killings and intimidation workers, both catholic and protestant have shown their solidarity with victimised workers. In Derry workers at the council depot walked out in sympathy with the father of a young worker who was the victim of a sectarian murder, while at 5 DHSS offices in the north workers held a one day strike to show their solidarity with catholic workers who had been threatened in Lisburn by the UFF. Unfortunately events such as these do not spark off any long term resistance they seem to be just a reaction to the worsening situation. As long as the basis of sectarianism remains which is loyalism propped up by the British state then such spontaneous movements of the working class will be difficult to capitalise on and build a non sectarian workers movement.

Much of the impetus for the northern working class to unite must come from the example of the southern working class, their struggles against capitalism and the rule of the church can only set a fine example to the northern workers of what can be achieved through struggle. Such moves by them against the church act as the best counter information propaganda, capable of defeating loyalist arguments.

What, in effect we are trying to say in this muddled and disjointed section of this paper is that workers unity in the north is realistic but up until the end of british rule can only be very limited, after that workers unity becomes essential to the safeguarding of a non sectarian north, that that movement depends very much upon the development of the southern working class in their struggles against the the state (the church) and capitalism and of course the development of non sectarian movements in the north. And that in Britain the struggle must be one of counter information on Ireland and the struggle to remove the British state from Ireland.

This section will have to remain incomplete as these arguments haven't yet been successfully ironed out in our own group. Our position on the IRA and Irish nationalism varies from person to person and therefore it would be presumptuous of the author of this paper to give anything but a brief outline of our position on the 'national question and workers unity! What I can safely say is that the above is the opinion of the whole group.

The paper has been designed to give an insight into the 'Anglo Irish Agreement' showing the real reasons for its implementation and in particular pointing out the links with the USA.

A lot has been left out, an analysis of the republican movements attitude to the agreement could not be included at this stage because this is a group statement and as a group we do not as yet have a unified position on republicanism and Irish nationalism, however we are in the process of ironing out any of the major disagreements we have and a paper on 'Republicanism and Irish Nationalism' will follow this over the next month or so. Also to many people there has been a lack of information in this paper on the day to day repression of the Irish working class by the British army and the RUC, again, we can only say that this was not intended to be a paper on repression, the paper is about the 'deal' and the loyalist reaction and the nature of loyalism, the subject of repression would require yet another paper of this size and from people who are directly affected.

We haven't come right out and stated the fate of the agreement, but what we can say about it, is that if the agreement's main objectives were to create, 'peace, stability and reconciliation', then in that respect it was a non starter and it will continue to fail to create that social climate. On the other hand, if it is a question of whether the deal will be successful in smashing loyalism, the IRA and creating a new moderate unionism again we would have to say that it will undoubtedly fail and that is because the deal fails to attack the fundamental problems of British rule and of capitalism.

What the deal will achieve is a spiral of sectarianism that will eventually tear down any of the bridges built by the communities over the past few years and will create a climate so hostile to any 'intervention' from either government that the deal could never survive. The next few months will be a critical time for the workers of this country, in the run up to the first anniversary of the signing of the deal in November, it will be a time when sectarianism claims the lives of many more workers and when any talk of workers unity will be put back years.

we would welcome any correspondence relating to this paper or whatever, all mail should be sent to:-



DO NOT REPRINT THIS ADDRESS