

# IRELAND: BEHIND THE IRA

In this interview conducted in August, Dennis Cassin neglected to deal with the religious racism within the IRA, he attempted to instead focus on the issues of the class struggle within Northern Ireland. A large part of the class struggle which he speaks about is between the advantaged and the disadvantaged, represented by the Protestants and the Catholics respectively. (Editor's note)

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by Karen Gellen

"The revolutionary call in the north of Ireland at the moment is for peace," according to Irish Republican Movement representative Dennis Cassin.

"That might not sound revolutionary," Cassin noted, "but it is, because it

revolutionary" movement from the people, and it hasn't achieved anything."

Sinn Fein and the IRA condemn individual terrorism divorced from the needs and consciousness of the masses, while upholding the right to use violence and to wage armed struggle. "It's only an armed and trained working class that will be listened to with respect," Cassin said. "We realize that the powers in Ireland will not hand us the country on a plate to make it a socialist republic. We know that in the final analysis we are going to have to defend the gains we have made and we're going to have a physically fight for the revolution in Ireland, but we, the Irish people, not an isolated elite, will decide when it is the right time to use force, and we will pick the battleground."

In this period, he continued, the movement is not involved in a military campaign, but is implementing a military policy of "defending any working-class area against incursions by the British army or the Royal Ulster Constabulary or right-wing mobs of whatever religious persuasion. Also, we will take retaliatory action against the British army or anybody else for activities against the working class and we have done that."

The adventurism of the Provisionals, and the sectarian killings and repression that they bring in their wake, have led to a significant demoralization of working class and the loss of many concrete gains of the earlier mass civil rights movement, Cassin noted. This gives a particular urgency to the present call for peace, he said. "The people have been taken out of the struggle by the Provisionals, they have no will to resist. Where before, if a British army patrol came along a street the people would be out shouting and jeering, making whistles and catcalls, now, people just sit in their houses, they don't move. The will to resist has been bombed out of them by the Provisionals and beaten out of them by the British army reaction to the Provisionals. And all you have in Northern Ireland now is two opposing armies fighting, the people are no longer involved in that struggle. Thus, we feel there is no way forward until the violence stops."

The split in the Irish movement was precipitated in the early 1960s when the IRA, decimated and isolated after an abortive military campaign on the border of the Southern state, was forced to regroup and make an analysis of its errors. It was in this period that the organization made a decisive turn toward an anti-imperialist, working-class line. "Our only politics was the gun," Cassin recalled. "We were a military elite, a conspiracy, that couldn't see any further than the end of the gun." The movement then understood, he said, that while it had exclusively targeted the British administration-soldiers, judges and the like in the north, "the so-called free republic in the south had been completely taken over economically by, in the main, British capital. We saw that the south was a neocolonial state, with the majority of its politicians constituting a comprador class. We then came to the conclusion that the enemy of the Irish people was British imperialism and saw that the only way to defeat imperialism was through a revolution. Our definition of revolution then became the change of power from one class to another."

The faction that became the Provisionals opposed the goal of a united, socialist Ireland, and split over the decision to build a mass, democratic movement in the north. The civil rights movement which was subsequently formed has a mass, working-class base, and served to focus international attention on the oppression of the Irish people.

The Republican forces also at that time began to develop the internationalist outlook that is an important aspect of its program today. "We don't see it as being a little parochial struggle," Cassin told the *Guardian*. "We see ourselves as part of the international struggle against imperialism. We consider ourselves to be part of the third world. Lots of people wouldn't accept that," he acknowledged, "but we say we are in actual fact a third world country-that's basically what our economy is, and everything else. And we see the rest of the third world as being our allies. We find from the early 1960s tried very hard to create international solidarity and to internationalize the Irish struggle. We have, for example, supported the Vietnamese struggle for over 12 years; we have consistently supported the MPLA in Angola; and a member of the Palestine Liberation Organization attended an anti-imperialist festival we organized in Ireland last month... Our movement does not take a hard line vis-a-vis either China or the Soviet Union."

Commenting on the international relations of the Provisionals, Cassin said, "Like everywhere else, the people who would be inclined to support them would be the ultra-'left' of this country and others. Trotskyist groups such as the Socialist Workers Party and the

International Socialists have given them 'critical support.' People of this outlook label the Official IRA 'Stalinist.' The Provisionals have a support organiza-

tion in this country which is of the ultra-right Irish Americans, very well organized, and supplying them with a lot of money. Libyan head of state Col. Qaddafi has come out in support of them."

Another political movement in Ireland is the pro-Moscow Irish Communist Party (ICP), which until 1970 had two separate parties in the country, one for the north and one of the south. "They thus recognized partition," Cassin noted, "which left them very weak on the national question." The ICP is a small party with a strong base in the trade union movement in the north, mainly among the Protestant workers. Party members, he said, have won many high positions within the trade unions, including the post of general secretary of the Irish Trade Union Congress, by having an "economist" line. "They have never educated or politicized the trade union movement," Cassin continued, "and the part is so Moscow-oriented as to be ridiculous. For example, they keep screaming 'detente, detente, detente,' without relating it to the problems of the people of their city or country. In 1970, the Communist Party was not able to prevent 5000 shipyard workers in Belfast from laying down their tools, walking off the job and marching through the streets demanding the introduction of internment without charge or trial. And all of the shop stewards and leaders of the big engineering unions are members of the communist Party."



Wounded demonstrator against British security forces in northern Ireland. Demonstrations took place Aug. 8 in Belfast to protest fifth anniversary of internment without trial.

"The Communist Party does not, I believe, have the potential for revolution in Ireland. They do not have the structure, they don't have a real base among the Irish people. I think we have that, and also we have the tradition of struggle. We are the descendants of those who have struggled from 1916 on. Also, the Communist Party is, as I said, weak on the national question. They don't really adhere to the idea that in an oppressed country, nationalism and socialism go hand-in-hand-they extract from Lenin only what they want."

Within Sinn Fein and the IRA, there have been some important structural changes recently, in line with the more advanced political perspective that has been developed. "It used to be that the IRA was an elite group, separated altogether from the party-the party was just its front," Cassin explained. "Now, you must be a member of the party before you can be a member of the IRA-we don't want any military elitists-and you must adhere to the policies of the Republican Movement." Although Sinn Fein is not a Democratic centralist

party, "that is the position we are struggling to attain, and we believe we are getting very close."

The party is explicitly Marxist and socialist, he said, and "we don't hide our views, even when contesting for elections." Political repression has, however, made the organizational transition difficult. Sinn Fein is a legal party in the south, while the IRA is out-lawed-if the two were openly synonymous, Sinn Fein would be forced underground.

With the antisectarian drive as the key, the Republican movement is "organizing around every aspect of the daily life of the people," said Cassin. "Our organization is based in the working-class. Working people are the backbone of the organization. We're organizing on a long-term basis, we don't see the revolution happening tomorrow. We think a revolutionary phase has passed in Ireland-1969-71-and there's no sense harping back to the revolutionary momentum of the past. Learn from the past, and move forward."

provides the only way to go forward with normal politics-that is, revolutionary politics, socialist politics. You become totally irrelevant, for example, if you're talking about massive unemployment when a 100-pound bomb goes off down the street 100 yards away from you."

As the fifth anniversary of the 1971 internment without trial order was marked Aug. 9, the Republican Movement, which includes the Sinn Fein Party and the Official Irish Republican Army (IRA), was blanketing the north with leaflets and posters with the key slogan, "Sectarianism kills workers." This antisectarianism campaign is aimed, Cassin said, at the principal roadblock confronting the liberation movement in Ireland, that of "a divided working class, each seeing the other as the enemy and killing each other, while the real enemy-British and American imperialism-is allowed to go scot-free without any major attacks being made on it."

The assassination of the New British ambassador in July by the Provisionals, and ultra-"left" split-off from the IRA, has, in this context, caused a further setback to the movement. "While I hate the British ambassador as much as anybody, and there are fairly good indications that this guy was part of the British intelligence network," the Republican spokesman explained, "a revolutionary has to be able to account for his actions and his actions have to be progressive. He must think out the reaction to what he does as well. With this British ambassador, it's arrogance, I think-an action that says 'we can't wait for you, the working class,' and that the working class is stupid."

"Now, in the southern state they are in the process of introducing further repressive legislation, and this action will be used as the excuse to do it. In what way did it really attack the basis of the system in Ireland? It's the same sort of action as those of the Symbionese Liberation Army here. It separates the