

# Towards a United Socialist Ireland

★ The main focus of this issue is the struggle in the North. The Irish Marxist Review, along with the Socialist Worker Network with which it is associated and People Before Profit of which it is a part, is an all-Ireland political project, opposed to the partition of Ireland and committed to a united Ireland.

However, the way we pose and struggle for the goal of a united Ireland is somewhat different from the way in which it has traditionally been posed. Traditionally, by republicans and nationalists the aim of a united Ireland was seen as an historic aim and principle to be realised by one of two methods: either by armed struggle driving out the British army and inducing the British Government to abandon its claim to the six counties or by peaceful negotiations which would eventually persuade the majority of the citizens in the North to accept merger with the Republic in the South. In this view the 'socialist' character (or not) of the ensuing 32-county republic would derive from the political ideals and policies of the new United Ireland government. 'Socialism' was therefore a kind of idealistic add-on to the struggle for Irish unity advocated by the left of the Republican movement and, sometimes, accepted at the level of rhetoric by the Sinn Féin leadership, but always seen as an 'extra' to the central aim of unification.

This approach was always contested from the left, particularly by



Trotskyists influenced by the theory of permanent revolution and by revolutionaries who took seriously the ideas, not just the name, of James Connolly. Their position was for a United Workers Republic with the idea that it would be the working class that would lead the struggle for unity and national freedom. Sometimes this was underpinned by the notion that a united Ireland on a capitalist basis was impossible (similar to the view that Apartheid could not be defeated without socialist revolution) and sometimes it degenerated into the idea that first you achieve socialism – in the North and/or the South – and then unification would be simple. However, over the years, this has tended to become rather an abstract commitment.

Our approach is different. We

start not from armed struggle or negotiations at the top but from the struggles of ordinary people, of workers and radical activists, on the ground.

For example, it is obvious that there is a vibrant young movement for reproductive rights and women's rights in both the South and the North. It is obvious that the victory in the Repeal movement (analysed in IMR 21) gave a massive impetus to the fight for a woman's right to choose in the North. Our job is to build on that common interest and common struggle by sending contingents to demonstrations and events from South to North and North to South and ensuring the exchange of speakers and ideas. In the process we build a 32-county consciousness and a 32-county socialist movement.

Actually the reality of this – it is not just an aspiration – was vividly demonstrated by the Belfast Rape Trial in March of this year. Within minutes of the not guilty verdict there was bitter outrage on social media in the South and in less than 24 hours there was a mass protest on O'Connell Street. As far as I know no one, literally no one, said 'That's in Belfast, that's a different country, that doesn't affect us here'. (In contrast to the question of Trump's visit where there always seems to be people on hand to say 'that's none of our business'.) As Eamonn McCann commented at the time it was a most impressive demonstration 'not for Irish unity but of Irish unity'.

4 | What is true of women's rights is equally true of LGBT+ rights, especially regarding the question of marriage equality and trans rights. The indictment of the DUP is not just that they are supporters of British imperialism and anti-Catholic bigots but that they are reactionary bigots across the board and that this is something they increasingly share, and are seen to share, with the reactionaries in the Catholic hierarchy.

The fight against racism and fascism also operates across the border. The defence of asylum seekers and refugees, against Direct Provision and detention centres; no to Britain First and Generation Identity, to Pegida Ireland and Hermann Kelly and Irexit Freedom; no to scapegoating and division; yes to Diversity and solidarity. These principles are the same in Derry and Belfast, Waterford and Dublin. We can work together through United Against Racism and we can support each other.

The same applies to solidarity with Palestine and People Before Profit representatives and activists (eg Eamonn McCann, Gerry Carroll MLA, Richard Boyd Barrett TD and Cllrs John Lyons and Tina MacVeigh) have been in the forefront of delivering that solidarity.

When it comes to environmental issues – fracking, waste disposal, air and sea pollution and above all climate change – to say they are cross-border and non-sectarian is an understatement. There can be no climate change-free zone in West or East Belfast, in the 6 counties or the 26 Counties or even in Ireland as a whole. Everyone, Protestant or Catholic, Muslim, Jew or atheist has a common interest in stopping runaway climate change and ending the plastification of our oceans. Everyone that is except the fraction

of the 1% who own and control the fossil-fuel industries and the governments and military linked to them.

The different jurisdictions make for some legislative differences and divergences in the rhythms of the struggle when it comes to fighting cuts and austerity. But the basic principles remain the same and it was through fighting austerity North and South that People Before Profit first established itself as a significant national force. This will continue.

Hand in hand with the struggle against austerity goes the rooting out of corruption and its endemic role in both rotten states. From Cash for Ash to Garda penalty points, Ian Paisley Jnr to Bertie Aherne, the issue crosses the border. The appointment of arch cover-up merchant, Drew Harris of the PSNI, as the new Garda Commissioner is a kind of back handed recognition of the growing cross border symmetry.

In this way the issue of Irish unity is reframed from below for the 21st century. Resistance to unification on the grounds that it will mean 'Rome Rule' rings increasingly hollow. The South will no longer tolerate Rome rule any more than the North. We need secular education, secular health and a secular politics across the island. A United Ireland is not just an historic principle and the fulfilment of a debt to the martyrs of the past but also a pressing need of the here and now arising 'from an existing class struggle, from an historical movement going on under our very eyes' to quote the Communist Manifesto. And such struggles will have socialists, socialist ideas and socialist aims built into them from the bottom up and from the very start.

In this issue

This approach to the question of a United Ireland is further explored

and amplified by Seán Mitchell in his article 'Is a United Ireland Inevitable?' and Shaun Harkin shows how the current impasse in the North is rooted in an ongoing crisis going back to the very nature of the Good Friday Agreement, which further entrenched sectarian division in the Northern state.

Goretti Horgan provides a powerful survey of the past and present oppression of women in the sectarian state that was the legacy of partition and of their ongoing struggles for equality and liberation. Matt Collins offers a detailed and masterly analysis of the explosion of '68 and the origins of 'the Troubles' which dispels various academic and 'revisionist' myths about the period which is neatly complemented by Eamonn McCann's evocative piece on the internationalist element in the Derry events. These five articles are added to by Kieran Allen's account of the history of the response to conflict in the North in and by the South.

Together these six studies present a comprehensive and sustained socialist response to the crisis in the North and the continuing project of a 32 county socialist republic. This is supplemented by Shaun Harkin's summary of the central ideas of James Connolly for the 150th anniversary of his birth and John Molyneux's review of Michael Smith's study of the Parachute Regiment in Belfast.

In addition we have a very interesting study of the intensifying national question in China by Simon Gilbert. There are also book reviews by Peadar O'Grady, Marnie Holborow, and Nicholas Coules of, respectively, Wilkinson and Pickett's new study of inequality and mental health, Asad Haider's critique of identity politics and John Clooney's biography of Archbishop John Charles McQuaid.