

IRELAND: NATIONAL
LIBERATION STRUGGLE OR
SOCIALIST REVOLUTION?



REVOLUTIONARY
INTERNATIONALIST
CONTINGENT IN
BRITAIN

Text of a talk given to the Nottingham Irish Solidarity Group
on 17th, September 1987.

Introduction

It is necessary to investigate the struggle of the Irish people and arrive at a clear and accurate view of it if effective solidarity with this struggle is to be built here in Britain. If the nature of this struggle is misrepresented then the resulting confusion is not likely to result in a strengthening of support. Here this question is approached from a Marxist-Leninist perspective.

Two types of revolution

During the twentieth century there have been two major types of revolutionary upheavals; national liberation struggle and socialist revolution. There are very significant differences between these two types of revolution and it is necessary to decide which is appropriate for Ireland at its present stage of development.

1. National liberation struggle. There have been and at present are in process many such struggles in the countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Examples include China, Indo-China, Zimbabwe, Nicaragua, Peru and the Philippines. This occurs in countries which are dominated from without by advanced capitalist countries such as America and Britain and where pre-capitalist social formations, especially feudalism, are still widespread.

The targets of national liberation struggle are imperialist domination and feudal oppression. The peasants in the countryside fight to expropriate landlords and the workers in the towns fight against capitalist employers. Such societies have a complex class structure which must be taken into account if successful revolutionary struggle is to occur. The following classes and strata are typically present in such countries:

Rural areas

Landlords - they have at least some feudal or semi-feudal relations with:

Peasants - divide into:

(a) Prosperous peasants - employ some other peasants

(b) Self-sufficient peasants - can live off own land and livestock

(c) Poor peasants - have little or no land and work for (a)

Urban areas

Comprador bourgeoisie - interests tied up with imperialists

National bourgeoisie - interests conflict with those of imperialists

Urban petit bourgeoisie - small scale craftsmen, traders and intelligentsia

Proletariat - originate from poor peasantry and are employed by those above

Lumpenproletariat - outcast elements on the margins of society

The political potentialities of these classes and strata are determined by their objective material positions and the conscious, organised political forces available to offer leadership. The landlords and comprador bourgeoisie have a vested interest in upholding imperialist domination and exploitation and thus they will oppose national liberation struggle. The self-sufficient peasants, poor peasants, proletariat and lumpenproletariat are oppressed by both feudalism and imperialism and thus it is in their interests to wage national liberation struggle. The prosperous peasants, the national bourgeoisie and the urban petit bourgeoisie are in a contradictory position because while their objective interests are to some extent in conflict with feudalism and imperialism they also have a conflict of interests with the poor peasants and the proletariat. Thus they are wavering elements and whether or not they oppose or support reactionary forces is a matter of the particular circumstances prevailing at a given time and the effectiveness of the political leadership offered to them by other classes.

The experience of Russia, China and other countries shows that imperialism and feudalism can only be defeated if an alliance is formed principally between workers and peasants together with some prosperous peasants, urban petit bourgeoisie and even national bourgeoisie against their common enemies, the landlords, comprador bourgeoisie and imperialists. This experience has been summed up in the theory of national liberation struggle developed under the leadership of Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tse-tung. In such countries the peasantry constitute the

great majority of the people but their political aims are limited. Their main demand is for a redistribution of land in their favour and their revolt is centred in the countryside. One important drawback of the geographical location of the peasantry is that it is difficult for them to control the towns, centres of communication and administration, and so peasant revolts are eventually defeated as happened in Mexico. The workers are located in the towns and are struggling mainly against the capitalist exploitation of the imperialists and their local agents. Given their particular situation the workers develop wider political horizons and more advanced political demands than do the rural peasantry. However the working class in these countries is relatively small and by itself it lacks the force necessary to defeat its enemies. Thus the formation of a worker-peasant alliance against feudalism and imperialism is essential if the aims of national liberation struggle are to be fully achieved. The working class, as organised and politically represented through a communist party of the Leninist type, is the leading element while the peasantry constitutes the main force of the revolutionary struggle.

The question of leadership is crucial for the success of national liberation struggle. Most national liberation struggles have been led by elements drawn from the national bourgeoisie and urban petit bourgeoisie and a recent example of such leadership is Zimbabwe. What always happens in these cases is that at some stage in the struggle these elements arrive at some sort of a compromise deal with the comprador bourgeoisie and the imperialists. The result is that the workers and peasants are not truly liberated although feudal relations may be smashed. Only where the proletariat and its communist party have led the national liberation struggle have imperialism and feudalism been decisively defeated as happened in China in 1949. It should be clearly understood that the aims of national liberation struggle are new democratic, i.e. land reform and the end of imperialist domination and exploitation, and are not socialist as such. Of course, it is true that unless the revolutionary struggle then proceeds to the further stage of socialist revolution the gains of the national liberation struggle will be lost. Even so, it is equally true that only when the tasks of the new democratic revolution have been carried out is it possible to push on to socialist revolution.

2. Socialist revolution. The classic model is that of a developed capitalist country where the working class are the great majority of the people and are oppressed and exploited by a monopoly capitalist class. The working class, perhaps in alliance with some middle strata elements, overthrow the capitalist class and its state apparatus and establish the

dictatorship of the proletariat whose task is to revolutionise the relations of production and consequently develop the forces of production so as to progressively move towards a classless, stateless and liberated communist society. Full communism is, of course, possible only on a world scale.

In fact socialist revolution has not yet occurred in an advanced capitalist society. There has been socialist revolution in some economically backward countries, namely Russia and China, although subsequently capitalist restoration has occurred in both of these countries. The possibility of socialist revolution occurring in economically backward countries, following on from new democratic revolution, is explained in Lenin's theory of modern imperialism.

The Case of Ireland

The main question to be posed is whether Ireland is at the stage of national liberation struggle or socialist revolution. The answer to this question is crucial because from it follow very different political strategies according to how it is answered.

There is not a class of feudal landlords in Ireland today. There are big landlords but they are engaged in capitalist relations of exploitation with tenant farmers and agricultural workers. However there does still exist a large peasantry of self-sufficient peasant proprietors and small farmer employers. This peasantry is numerically declining but it is still true to say that Ireland is a peasant country. There are still strong feudal elements in cultural and political forms such as the influence of the Roman Catholic Church and the system of political patronage in the countryside.

Ireland is certainly still under imperialist domination. Not only did the revolt of 1916 and after fail to achieve full formal political independence but it also failed to shift the imperialist domination of the Irish economy. The Irish national bourgeoisie and urban petit bourgeoisie failed to develop Ireland into a modern, advanced capitalist country. Ireland remains an industrially underdeveloped country very reliant on agricultural exports and unable to provide a livelihood for all of its people. In these respects it is very like the so-called Third World countries.

In economic terms British imperialism has been considerably displaced by American, West German and Japanese imperialist interests. However the British state hangs on in the six counties for political and strategic

reasons. The industrial basis of British imperialism in the Six Counties, in shipbuilding and textiles, has declined but investments by other imperialists in the South means that the size of the working class there has increased. The Irish bourgeoisie, to a considerable extent in fact an Anglo-Irish bourgeoisie, is largely comprador in character.

Despite these economic developments in recent decades, the working class in Ireland is still a minority of the population. Even if they become a majority there still will be other significant social elements present, the peasantry and the urban petit bourgeoisie. Furthermore there is the question of the role of the Loyalist labour aristocracy in the Six Counties. The uneven, distorted nature of Ireland's economic development, brought about by imperialist dominance, means that the working class may never become a majority of the population in Ireland because they are continuously exported. Every year thousands of young Irish people leave their country because it is unable to provide them with a livelihood.

Given this brief survey, it can be argued that Ireland is still at the stage of national liberation struggle although, of course, success in this will not be consolidated unless it proceeds further to socialist transformation.

The implications for solidarity work in Britain

The fact is that it is Sinn Fein/Irish Republican Army who are presently leading the anti-imperialist struggle in Ireland. It is true that Irish Republican politics are nationalist and reformist rather than internationalist and revolutionary. The Republican movement simply aims for a united Irish state with a social democratic government. Although they do have the support of sections of the working class and peasantry the class character of the politics of the SF/IRA leadership is essentially petit bourgeois and not working class. For this reason they will not be able to unite and lead sufficient forces to achieve full national liberation.

So should communists in Britain support SF/IRA? Whatever the limitations of their politics they are actively opposing imperialism, especially British imperialism, and in so far as they carry on doing so it is correct to support them. It is not the task of Marxist-Leninists in Britain to develop a proper communist party in Ireland to win leadership of the national liberation struggle there. It is our internationalist duty to assist if possible in this task but only communists in Ireland can actually build such a proletarian

6
revolutionary party. Our task in Britain is to develop a real communist party here. Part of the process of bringing this about consists of struggling to develop an internationalist outlook among sections of the working class here in Britain. Thus we should certainly urge the working class in Britain to support the anti-imperialist struggle of the Irish people. However this should be done on an internationalist rather than a nationalist basis. Instead of simply appealing for solidarity on the grounds that all nations have the right of self-determination, an essentially bourgeois demand, we should urge workers to support fellow workers and other oppressed people in Ireland because they all share a common enemy, the British monopoly capitalist class and other imperialist powers as well. The struggle of the Irish people serves to weaken the British ruling class and this helps workers in Britain while if the working class in Britain steps up its struggle against that same class this weakens its capacity to carry on its occupation of part of Ireland.

VICTORY TO THE IRISH PEOPLE!

WORKERS AND OPPRESSED PEOPLES OF ALL COUNTRIES, UNITE!