

Troops out! Prisoners out!

Workers Solidarity Movement

1995

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We welcome the cease-fire. The “peace process”, however, has little to recommend it. It represents little more than arguments over who exactly will administer capitalism in Ireland. On issues such as the release of prisoners or the disbanding of the RUC there is nothing to be discussed. Both these should happen unconditionally. The debate over de-commissioning of IRA weapons is meaningless. All that the current negotiations are doing is establishing a pecking order among the parties in the north.

In 1962 the unionists accepted the IRA’s word that Operation Harvest [the Border Campaign] was over and released prisoners without requiring decommissioning of arms. The opposition of the mainstream unionists to a prisoner release now is based on their opposition to the “peace process”, and it’s limited threat of power sharing. Sinn Féin says that the armed campaign was a political struggle but the British government classes the prisoners as common prisoners, and so will not release them now as that would be an admission that they are really prisoners of war.

Inhuman conditions

The refusal to transfer prisoners in Britain to the north means that many of them remain in grossly inhumane conditions, in particular in the isolation unit of Wakefield. Ten of these prisoners have now spent 20 years in British jails, 20 years of severe hardship not only for them but also for their families. Six of these ten were convicted of charges less serious than murder. All the prisoners should be released immediately and unconditionally.

The continued unacceptability of the RUC — a sectarian police force — was underlined by events around July 12th. Earlier that week, in Belfast, a number of Catholics had their houses petrol bombed after a loyalist march through the Lower Ormeau Road was stopped. The RUC responded to this, not by going after the loyalists responsible, but by putting the Lower Ormeau under siege on the 12th to make sure the loyalists (in the form of the Ballynafeigh District Orange Lodge) would swagger through a nationalist area uninterrupted.

They acted as the paid thugs of loyalism. The RUC sealed off the Lower Ormeau at 5am, using a force of nearly 150 armoured jeeps and over 1,000 officers in riot gear. Five hundred nationalist protesters who tried to reach the Ormeau bridge were attacked by the RUC, hospitalising four.

Victim’s widow arrested

On the Lower Ormeau itself the RUC went so far as to arrest Rosaline McManus, widow of Willie McManus who was one of five men killed by the UDA/UFF at the Graham’s bookies’ shop massacre on the Ormeau Road in 1992. Her ‘crime’ was to ask the RUC to ensure that no bands would be playing as the Orangemen passed the shop. The dead man’s sister, who was in a wheelchair, was pushed down a nearby side street by the RUC. Camera crews were kept out of the area for three hours.

However the debate about creating an “acceptable” police force is one anarchists have little interest in. The RUC already has the harp on its cap badge. Creating a new police force that contained many nationalists might get rid of some of the sectarianism but this new force would still not be acceptable.

The problem with the RUC is not just its composition but also the primary role it shares with every other police force. This role is the protection of the property of the rich and the mainte-

nance of order for the government. The southern Gardaí or the British police are not dominated by religious bigots but this has never stopped them being used against demonstrators or strikers.

Ludicrous expectations

Sinn Féin's radical rhetoric has been dropped, joining any pretence at 'socialist' politics in the dustbin. Their main demand at present is not for 'Troops Out', or even for the release of Republican prisoners. Instead we are requested to protest for 'All Party Talks'. Who can believe now that Sinn Féin are somehow 'different' from other political parties? And who still believes that any group of would-be leaders is interested in real change? Sinn Féin is calling for Gerry Adams, John Hume, Ian Paisley, John Alderdice and James Molyneaux, along with a few other "good men", to sit down and decide the future for the rest of us.

It would be ludicrous to expect that anything capable of dealing with the problems faced by ordinary people would emerge from this cabal. In fact, no small bunch of leaders can sort out our problems for us (and particularly not that bunch!!). The problems shared by Catholic, Protestant and atheist workers will only be solved when we come together, recognise our common interests, and take over society ourselves.

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