

*227 Bazaar Road  
Trinidad  
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# PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY IN ULSTER



**Bernadette Devlin and others**

*This interview with leading members of People's Democracy took place in Derry on the evening of April 20 1969, as the crisis which was finally to unseat O'Neill opened. Three days previously, Bernadette Devlin had been elected in Mid-Ulster. On the previous evening, a march through Burntollet had been banned, and a protest in Derry had exploded into a full-scale confrontation between the police and the Catholic working class. The participants in this interview are:- Liam Baxter, 23, student and member of Queen's University RSSF; Bernadette Devlin, 22, student at Queen's and now an M.P.; Mike Farrell, 25, technical college lecturer and member of the executive of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association; Eamonn McCann, 26, unemployed and member of the Derry Young Socialists; Cyril Taman, 26, technical college lecturer. Apart from Liam Baxter, all the participants stood for PD in the Stormont elections.*

## People's Democracy: a Discussion on Strategy

*How did the Civil Rights movement and People's Democracy start and what is their relationship to each other?*

*Farrell.* Formally the Civil Rights Association has been going for about two years and was conceived by its founders as an all-party organization similar to the National Council for Civil Liberties in England. It went out of its way, for example, to ensure that there was a pet Unionist on its executive. The tendency which wants to keep the CRA as a broad class-collaborating organization still remains within it.

*McCann.* The CRA behaved in the manner of all such organizations: it did nothing except issue press statements calling on the Unionist Government to be a bit more liberal. Then in August 1968 a number of people in Dungannon decided to have a Civil Rights march to protest over the allocation of housing in that area.

They invited the CRA, as the relevant organization, to lead the march, which it did. The march was stopped by Craig and the Paisleyites. After Dungannon some of us decided to have a Civil Rights march in Derry on October 5th. That march met with the most appalling and partisan brutality on the part of the police. The Civil Rights *movement* began then, and the CRA has been swamped in the movement.

People's Democracy began as a result of the police behaviour in Derry on October 5th. A number of Queens University students who were among the Civil Rights marchers went back to Belfast and organized a march there in protest against the police brutality. That march was also stopped and the students returned to the University somewhat demoralized and very confused. They began talking about what they should do and PD emerged from that discussion.

*Farrell.* But PD is not just part of the Civil Rights movement, it is a revolutionary association. Its formation was considerably influenced by the Sorbonne Assembly and by concepts of libertarianism as well as socialism. It has adopted a very democratic type of structure; there is no formal membership and all meetings are open. At the moment this structure is not working very satisfactorily, and I think it will be necessary, within the overall framework, to find a way of introducing a little more co-ordination. I had hoped that the PD would realise the necessity of taking a stand on class issues, and would therefore transform itself into a broadly socialist body, though a non-sectarian one in which socialists of several different tendencies could co-operate. I no longer think this will happen of its own accord. There have recently been some sharp disagreements within PD and differences have arisen between socialists and an alliance of anarchists and right wingers.

*Had the militants in PD worked together before it was formed?*

*Farrell.* The people who were batoned in Derry on October 5th and who were involved in the subsequent formation of PD were mainly members of the Young Socialist Alliance. They travelled to Derry together as the Young Socialist Alliance, which at that time was about 30 or 40 strong and consisted of students and recent graduates of Queens, and they were responsible for the subsequent protest in Belfast. So right from the start the Young Socialist Alliance was the core of Peoples' Democracy. It involved three of the people who are here now.

*Your central demands appear at first sight to be reformist— one man, one job and one family, one house. Why have you focussed on these specific issues?*

*McCann.* Because the transformation of Irish society necessary to implement these reforms is a revolution. We are definitely in a pre-revolutionary situation in the north. The Unionist Party must give something to the pope-heads of Derry to get them off the streets, but

if they give them anything the Unionist party will break up. So by supporting these demands in a militant manner, we are supporting class demands and we are striking hard against the ruling political party.

*Farrell.* Our general strategy in the past was that we should enter into the Civil Rights movement in order to participate in the mobilization and radicalization of the Catholic working class, and to radicalize the civil rights demands themselves. We should now move forward in two ways. 1. We should complete the ideological development of the Catholic working class 2. We should develop concrete agitational work over housing and jobs to show the class interests of both Catholics and Protestants. We have delayed far too long trying to develop the ideology of the Catholic working class and agitating on specific class issues. It is certainly now time that People's Democracy became an organization capable of carrying out this agitational work, for example, producing leaflets and—more important—a paper which carries analyses of that situation. If PD can't do this then it is time for the socialists in the PD and in the Civil Rights movement to form a direct socialist organization.

*McCann.* In fact we have failed to get our position across. We keep saying parrot-like that we are fighting on working-class issues for working-class unity, that our objective is a workers' and farmers' socialist republic. But when you say to the people in the Bogside area in Derry that they are being exploited because they are workers not because they are Catholics, they are not very inclined to believe you. All their lives they have been told by the Unionist Party that this is a Protestant state for Protestant people, and that pope-heads will be beaten into the ground if they dare to open their mouths. Moreover a number of jumped up opportunist nationalist politicians who have been the only means of expression of Catholic discontent, have accepted the Unionist perspective, and have deepened the religious divide. The consciousness of the people is still most definitely sectarian. The reason that we have failed to get our position across is that we have failed to fight any sort of political struggle *within* the Civil Rights movement, and the reason for that is that as revolutionary socialists we have been used, through the years, like revolutionary socialists in England, to talking to tens of people. Now suddenly, since October the 5th, we have found that we have an audience listening to us and applauding us, of tens of thousands of people. We got carried away by this, and submerged the Young Socialist Alliance in the PD; we submerged our politics into the Civil Rights movement. All that we managed to get across was that we were more extreme than the Civil Rights people. We have never made it clear that this difference in militancy stemmed from a political difference, we never made it clear why we were more militant; and the reason for that, I believe, is that we have been frightened of scaring off our mass audience. We thought that we had to keep these people, bring them along, educate and radicalize them. It

was a lot of pompous nonsense and we failed absolutely to change the consciousness of the people. The consciousness of the people who are fighting in the streets at the moment is sectarian and bigoted.

*Yet you have taken a principled position on the religious issue and have won a considerable following. Do you think you have failed to break the grip of sectarianism even over the Catholics who support you?*

**Farrell.** We have radicalized the Catholic working class to quite a considerable extent, and in some degree got across to them the necessity of non-sectarianism and even the fact that their Protestant fellow worker is almost as much exploited as they are. But we have failed to get across at all to the Protestant working class. So there is now a more radicalized Catholic working class, whilst the Protestant proletariat is still as remote and inert as ever.

**McCann.** I think this assessment is very wrong. Yesterday in Derry, after Catholic workers became enraged by the Paisleyites waving the Union Jack at them, they made for what we call the Fountain area, which is a Protestant working-class ghetto. As a group of Catholic workers, they instinctively made for a Protestant working class area once their emotions had been aroused, and they left no doubt in anyone's mind that when they got there they intended to beat the daylighters out of any Protestants they found. I believe that we have failed to get our position across in the last six months. It is perfectly obvious that people do still see themselves as Catholics and Protestants, and the cry 'get the Protestants' is still very much on the lips of the Catholic working class. Everyone applauds loudly when one says in a speech that we are not sectarian, we are fighting for the rights of all Irish workers, but really that's because they see this as the new way of getting at the Protestants.

**Toman.** That is only partly true. We have not as yet worked very hard at getting the support of the Protestant workers, but we have radicalized the Catholic working class and to a certain extent separated them from the Catholic middle class. In future we must use the enthusiasm of the Catholic workers to get across to the Protestant working class as well. For example in Armagh a member of the PD who is also a republican managed to get the local people to form a united tenants' action committee which does have some Protestant working-class support.

**Farrell.** Yes, I think that Eamonn's view is very much conditioned by Derry. It has certainly been my experience in other areas, particularly Bannside, where we fought the election and set up civil rights committees and in Mid-Ulster generally, that there is not this hostility towards Protestants. For example at an election meeting at Moneymore the other night we were stoned and beaten by extremist Protestants, but

the people supporting us were not provoked and did not attempt to retaliate. I have repeatedly found—though this may be non-sectarianism in theory rather than practice—that if you urge Catholics to accept Protestants as their brothers, this is always welcomed with a cheer and a clap. They are very devoted to the idea of not being sectarian even when in practice they may not have much opportunity to do this.

*Devlin.* I found myself that I did get through to Protestants while fighting this election. I had letters of support from Protestants, who still had the mentality of apologising for the fact, starting off 'I am a Protestant but as a socialist I agree with everything you say.' Our real difficulty is the support we get from people who are opposed to the Unionist party, not because it is capitalist, but because they associate it with having oppressed them because they are Catholics. Despite the fact that we are socialist we still get a lot of support from Catholic capitalists and bigots. I think that the Protestants may be the best of our supporters because they are the more radical people, and that their socialism is more radical as they have worked out their positions. The basis on which we can communicate with the Protestants is by being honestly socialist.

People outside Northern Ireland fail to appreciate the confusion that exists here; nobody knows what they want or how to achieve it, and the sectarian division prevents some people from even discussing these problems. There are those who say that you must not mention words like 'Republic', because it raises the fear of a united Ireland in the minds of the Protestant working class. Others say 'Go out and say you are a socialist.' Others say that everyone knows you are a socialist but that one must not say so because that will offend people who think that socialism is communism and is anti-christianity. Finally although I personally believe there is very little christianity in this country, there is a lot of religion, and the one way you would unite Protestants and Catholics is by trying to get rid of both churches at once.

*You have referred to the original march through Burnttollet, and yesterday's struggle started from a protest over the banning of a second march there. To what extent have you leafleted the Protestant areas you will be actually marching through, explaining to them that that the march is not meant as an aggression against them?*

*McCann.* Absolutely none. Only occasional, half-hearted efforts have ever been made at doing this. We have never had a perspective here.

*But you've been trying to march through these areas since January.*

*McCann.* All we have done is issue little press statements and ranted and raved at public meetings. There has been no concrete work done because there is no organization which has been able to sit down and say

this is our perspective, this is our reason for being in the Civil Rights movement, and what we want out of the Civil Rights movement is A and B and C and here is how we go and get it. All our failures spring from the lack of anything even resembling a revolutionary party. You see, who would issue such a leaflet? Certainly not the Civil Rights movement who would never allow us to produce a leaflet explaining to the Protestant working class our reasons for marching through Burntollet. The CRA would split immediately because we have unbridgable differences with the so called moderates within the Civil Rights movement. There is nothing which exists that could issue such a leaflet.

*Farrell.* People's Democracy could issue such a leaflet.

*McCann.* It doesn't exist here.

*Farrell.* People's Democracy could do it in Belfast and it could do it in Derry too, because the People's Democracy *idea* exists in Derry and that would give it enough following to allow you to issue such a leaflet.

*If you accept Eamonn's account of Derry, what is the situation in Belfast? Your position there seems very weak by comparison.*

*Baxter.* The situation in Belfast has not been developed and there have been no big meetings or marches there, but I think that you would get massive support if you tried to hold them there.

*Farrell.* PD was initially an almost wholly student organization and was reluctant to go on marches in Belfast at times when ordinary workers could take part, largely because they were afraid that they would be sectarian. PD has now broken down that barrier and there is a projected march for Belfast in the near future. There is every reason to believe that we shall have a large turn-out, not because of the strength of the PD but because of the Republicans who do have a considerable following in Belfast behind their theoretically non-sectarian programme.

*Is that the Republicans or the Republican Labour Party?*

*Toman.* The Republican *movement*, not the Republican Labour Party, which has practically no membership and no following except for that of Gerry Fitt. Fitt is a popular Westminster MP because he does good social work on a non-sectarian basis, and gets houses for Protestants as well as Catholics, but he has no coherent political position.

*This raises the question of your own organization. What is the state of it?*

*Devlin.* We are totally unorganized and totally without any form of

discipline within ourselves. I'd say that there are hardly two of us who really agree, and it will take a lot of discussion to get ourselves organized. The fact of the matter is that everybody knows where they don't want us to go, but nobody really knows what they do want and nobody is prepared to organize: we are all madly tearing off—nowhere.

*Toman.* A few people did come together before the Westminster election.

*Devlin.* Yes, about ten or fifteen in a population of more than a million.

*Toman.* Also, we did attempt to set up a group before the Stormont elections in January, but that too fell into abeyance. The Stormont Election completely dispersed us. Which may prove to have been beneficial, in that it forced us to break clear of our student base whilst at the same time we established ourselves as a national force. But it did mean that we lost the physical proximity necessary to strengthen ourselves politically and organizationally. Now in fact we face the problem of organizing PD from scratch.

*McCann.* As I've already said, the reason we have no organization is that we effectively dissolved ourselves politically into the Civil Rights movement: so effectively, in fact, that we have nothing to recruit people into once they have been radicalized by that movement. It has been a crucial error and a grievous one.

*The local Civil Rights associations in the different towns seem to have been substitutes for your own organization. Have they merely compounded your problems?*

*Farrell.* The Republicans have also been of very great organizational assistance, both to PD marches, such as the Long march in January, and to the Civil Rights and PD meetings in towns, where they have often provided the stewards and so on. As far as the local Civil Rights associations are concerned, they have brought us right up against the Catholic bourgeoisie. Initially, when the CR committees were formed they tended to be committees of the local bourgeoisie of each area, sometimes with a token gesture in the direction of workers. Only in Derry, where it sprang directly from the events of October 3th, was a Citizens' Action Committee elected by a public meeting. Other local committees were called for by the national CRA out of the context of a local struggle. All of them have emphasized the ending of the religious discrimination that has a painful effect on the prospects of the Catholic middle class, and an end to the Special Powers Act, which is aimed almost exclusively at Catholics. We have tried to swing the emphasis onto more general social and economic demands. For example, rather than demanding less discrimination in the allocation of housing we have

demanded more houses, and we have had a certain amount of success. There has been a definite shift away from the green Tories and nationalists who originally dominated the committees.

*McCann.* There is a mis-statement of fact in what Mike says, which is important because of its reverberations. The Derry citizens' action committee was not elected by a mass meeting of any sort. It was elected by a meeting of about one hundred of the Catholic middle class of Derry on October 9th, specifically to steer the movement away from dangerous territory. There is a millionaire among its four leading members but not a single working man, and even though they have failed so far to channel the thing in a safe direction they will always try to stop short of a fundamental confrontation.

*Toman.* There is a new problem. So far we have spent much more of our time getting people to act and to react to situations, than we have in working out how in the long run action will really assist them. Coming together for this interview is probably the first time the people here have discussed problems in any depth for a couple of months. Now originally the difference between us and the bourgeois Civil Rights leaders was that we advocated action and they didn't, and our strength in the movement grew because of that. The Catholic middle class have now cottoned-on to this and have in many areas begun to advocate action themselves, usually action which is meaningless from anybody's point of view, which they can't control and whose consequences they do not perceive. Yesterday's proposed march through Burntollet is an example. It was called by the local Civil Rights association without any national consultation, either with the CR executive or with us. They were unable to react to the completely predictable threat that the Orangemen would oppose them with force, and when the march was banned all they could do was simply call everything off. Our danger is that the Catholic middle class will propose a whole series of mindlessly militant actions across the province, and that instead of forming any socialist party will have to chase all over the place trying to scrape up some meaningful debris from these actions. Indeed this process seems to have already started.

*The implication is that you are shoring up the Civil Rights movement, firstly by posing militant demands which mobilize the Catholic workers and small farmers, giving the movement its numbers, and secondly by keeping this militancy within the arc of the Civil Rights movement. At the same time, it appears that you have been unable to transform it. So although at first sight you give it direction and punch, it seems that you are in fact performing a servicing function for the CRM rather than vice versa?*

*Toman.* Yes, this is broadly true. There have been some attempts to change it though. For example, in Armagh Civil Rights have called for a march some time in May and the PD group which has formed there

even discussed not supporting such a march which, like the previous one in the town, is only likely to lead to a sectarian balls-up. But instead we decided to have a week of actions prior to the march, picketing, demonstrating over the housing problem there, occupying the labour exchange and issuing leaflets; in other words making our socialist position clear, and then participating in the Civil Rights march on those terms. Either they will have to reject us or we will transform the Civil Rights issue into one based on socialist demands.

*In striking contrast to England there is a living revolutionary tradition in Ireland. What forms does it take and how does it assist you?*

*McCann.* It's Republicanism, and the idea of the revolution is implanted in the minds of the Irish people surrounded by the glory of 1916 and its revolutionary martyrs. The idea of revolution is not at all alien to the Irish working class, as it is to the English, and when one calls for revolution, no matter what one actually demands there is always a link to Connolly and to 1916 and the armed uprising. What we have to do is to complete the national revolution by making the theoretical and practical link between what we are doing now, and what was fought for in 1916.

*Farrell.* Bourgeois democracy and the national state are recent developments in Ireland and their traditions do not run deep, in contrast to the tradition of armed insurrection, of revolution as a means. Republicanism, which is a radical movement based mainly on small peasant farmers, is the culmination of a long popular tradition of agitation for some sort of co-operatively organized farming society. This is something which more orthodox forms of metropolitan socialism must come to terms with, in a rural society like Ireland, and what we are trying to do is to link this very powerful tradition to the concept of international proletarian revolution.

*How do you see the present political situation developing?*

*Farrell.* My own views on this are rather tentative at the moment. In the past we tended to see O'Neill as representing modern liberalizing capitalism, and in particular the interests of English, American and West German big capital as against the older native capitalism. O'Neill wanted to modernize things to bring them more or less into line with the rest of Western society. Further we thought that this sort of development was almost inevitable, with perhaps a Paisleyite backlash against it. Now it seems clear that although O'Neill represents these things, Northern Ireland cannot see the triumph of modernizing capitalism. The Paisleyite backlash of Protestant workers and farmers is so powerful it looks as though the reformers cannot win without destroying the Unionist Party, and if they destroy the Unionist Party they cannot win at all. Unless, perhaps, they could form a link with the bourgeois

section of the Civil Rights movement, but it seems that the Civil Right movement has gone too far for that now.

*What are your strategic conceptions? How are you going to develop into a force for revolution?*

*Farrell.* The question of a revolutionary programme is a very complex one here in Northern Ireland. We cannot call for all power to the Soviets because our present basis is not the working class as a whole, or the working class and small farmers as a whole, it is only one section of the working class. This leaves us with the question of whether we concentrate initially on putting forward the largely reformist demands which could unite Catholics and Protestant working class, or whether we concentrate on posing the question of dual power in areas where the Catholic population is concentrated and militant—by getting the local Catholic population to take over and run its own affairs, a sort of 'Catholic power'. This would be a very serious decision, but it is just possible that it might be necessary for us to establish such dual power: on the one hand Catholic-based power, of a socialist form, and on the other, Unionist state power. This would demand a socialist movement among the Catholics to create socialist councils such that Protestant workers can see that they fulfil class demands rather than creed demands, and want to create councils for themselves or merge with the Catholics in them.

*Would this raise the question of secession?*

*Farrell.* Well, there's no question whatsoever of that, because the areas where the Catholic section of the population is militant are not the two areas which are supposed to have Catholic majorities—Tyrone and Fermanagh. The most militant area is Derry, after that perhaps Newry which is in South Armagh, after that perhaps a *part* of county Tyrone. Anyway you couldn't take out whole areas like Fermanagh and Tyrone because they contain vast tracts of country which are inhabited by people of very extreme Protestant views. Secession is as out of the question as is assistance from the 26 counties, where the bourgeois government, far from assisting any working-class movement (as I'm afraid some people in the Bogside imagine) will immediately fall with the six-country bourgeois government. The problem as I see it is that if you went ahead and tried to establish dual power in Catholic sectors you would have to do this in a number of clearly delineated and separate areas—Derry, Newry, Cole Island and Dungannon, perhaps. The other way of dealing with the sectarian divide is to shift the whole emphasis of the CR movement away from symbolic activities such as marches to smaller agitational groups working on housing, farming and employment, and try and involve Protestants in these.

*McCann.* There is a terrible confusion in what has just been said over the

business of Catholic areas electing local committees. We must always remember that there are already Catholic areas with 'Catholic power'. Newry has an overwhelmingly Catholic majority, too great to be gerrymandered. It *has* Catholic power. Further, there is nothing more calculated to prove to the Protestant working class that the Civil Rights people all wear papal flags under their jerseys, than the establishment of unofficial pope-head councils in areas like Derry and Dungannon. It would remove the possibility of winning any Protestants over to our cause and therefore nothing could put the establishment of *socialist* power further into the distance.

*Farrell.* Eamonn is wrong about Newry. In Newry you have an urban council elected under a restricted ratepayer's franchise; a bourgeois electoral framework which in the past has enabled an alliance of the Unionist Party and Green Tories to control the council against a weak and watery Irish Labour Party. What I suggested as a possibility was something quite different, the election of *popular* councils based on universal franchise defying the bourgeois state and not recognizing Stormont, which of course Newry Urban council does. This would be something totally anti-bourgeois. I'm not saying that this is the answer, I'm saying that we have to think about this as a possible answer.

*McCann.* Let me explain. You cannot have a Catholic popular council elected and then reveal the socialist nature of it. If you want to elect a socialist council you must campaign on radical socialist issues. It is impossible, for example, to elect a 'Catholic power' body which can do anything about housing. One of the reasons *why* there are not enough houses in Northern Ireland is that the central house-building agency, the Northern Ireland Housing Trust, owes £73,000,000 to the Central Bank and paid £3,500,000 alone in interest last year. This sort of thing has to be brought into the open, by campaigning on demands for the nationalization of the housing societies and the cancellation of the housing trust debt. O'Neill represents an adaptation to the changing needs of imperialism in Northern Ireland, an attempt to escape from the old sectarian slogans which have ceased to be an adequate political arsenal for the modern bourgeois leader. He is going to fail because the North is tied, just as the South is in different ways, to Britain, and therefore to the failure of the Wilson government to solve the crisis of capitalism in Britain. O'Neill knows, and the whole Unionist Party knows, that they cannot deliver any better economic deal for the people of Northern Ireland in the immediate future. Unless we understand this and start to link it up to the cuts in the social services, the laws against the Trade Unions and so on, we are never going to be able to build any organization capable of overthrowing Toryism in this country. If we talk about local issues like Catholic councils without campaigning on the broad issues, we will never get anywhere.

*Farrell.* This is a misinterpretation of what I am saying. I used the words 'Catholic power' humorously. What I in fact meant was that in areas of heightened struggle such as Derry, or areas of Derry, it would be possible to elect a popular council. Now a popular council would, in the nature of things in Northern Ireland, be a Catholic council in that it would be mainly elected by Catholic workers. But it would not be elected as a Catholic council, and the purpose of electing it would not be to remedy the lack of representation of Catholics. It would be elected as a people's council in an area where people are singularly militant. It would be elected to remedy popular demands and therefore it would come up against all the general issues, such as interest rates for loans on housing, and it would have to campaign against them.

*McCann.* Dual power in this situation can only be Catholic power versus what Mike calls Unionist state power, which would in effect be Protestant power. You would not carry the Catholic middle class with you on such a programme, so it would be Catholic workers more or less versus the rest. Given the consciousness of the people at the moment, to which we have contributed, it could not be done. What we have got to do now is to realize what a mess we have made of the whole thing over the past few months. To give you an example of how big a mess we have made of it, we have been chanting 'One man-One job' for months, especially in Derry where we have the most militant and largest Civil Rights movement in the country. A few months ago half the work force of a factory in Derry was laid off, Catholics and Protestants alike. No one thought about organizing a march, of making our demands specific and concrete. We didn't raise the demand of 'No redundancies, work sharing on full pay'. We were so busy shouting 'One man-One job' and in keeping our mass audience, that when a real concrete material issue came up on which it might have been possible to prove to Protestant workers that what we are demanding is in their material interests, we were running around the streets in the Civil Rights movement. We have failed to give a socialist perspective because we have failed to create any socialist organization. What we must do now, even in the volatile state of politics we are in tonight in Northern Ireland, is to set up with the greatest urgency a serious organization. Even if it is only something into which we can recruit people to form lines of communication. We cannot form a Bolshevik party overnight. Rather than set up councils, we must try to set up some sort of radical socialist front between republicans and ourselves.

*Farrell.* The two are not necessarily contradictory. When the Bolsheviks campaigned for all power to the Soviets, the Soviets and the Bolshevik Party were not the same thing. The Bolshevik party existed as a party making demands and making an analysis. The Soviets were radical assemblies of workers. It would be possible to have a revolutionary socialist party, as well as to establish people's councils and fight for

a majority on those councils. I do not want to be represented as an advocate of 'Catholic Power', but I do insist that we have to explore the radical possibilities of the base that we do have, at this moment, among the working class, and that base is the Catholic section of the working class.

*Whatever the differences between you on the immediate potential of the Catholic working class, you all seem to agree that the road to socialism in Ireland must pass via the Protestant working class. Is that so?*

*Toman.* I would answer that by saying bluntly, yes. It may seem rather unfortunate if one puts it like that, but if we are going to have a socialist workers' republic then we have got to have Protestants in it. They are the section of the people who support us least, but they are a decisive part of the urban proletariat. Therefore everything depends on winning them over.

*Baxter.* It's not even a question of their being in the majority in Ulster. You can't have a revolution in Ulster alone, and our aim must be to create a socialist republic, something on the lines of Cuba, without waiting for a British workers' republic—or we might have to wait a very long time. But even in Ireland as a whole, let alone Ulster, you cannot move in a socialist direction unless you have the support of some sections of the Protestant working class. Otherwise they will start a sectarian struggle and all the forces of Catholic reaction will swamp us.

*Farrell.* Could I say something about the question of the border here? The border must go, but it must go in the direction of a socialist republic and not just into a republic which might at some future date become socialist. Firstly the border must go because it is a relic of imperialism, and in order to root out imperialism we have to root out the neo-imperialist set-up in the South and the neo-colonial one in the North. Secondly, Northern Ireland is completely unviable economically and only exists as a capitalist entity at the moment because of massive subventions from Britain. Similarly the South on its own is an area of small farms with very little industry. It too is completely unviable on its own and as a result is also dependent on Britain. The unification of Ireland into a socialist republic is not only necessary for the creation of a viable economy, it must also be an immediate demand, because only the concept of a socialist republic can ever reconcile Protestant workers, who rightly have a very deep-seated fear of a Roman Catholic republic, to the ending of the border.

*Who are your allies south of the Border?*

*Farrell.* Our allies in the South are socialists, trade unionists and radical Republicans. The problem that we have in the South and which we met on our Easter march from Belfast to Dublin, is that there is more

sympathy with our approach among the older people, the radical section of Sinn Fein and Trade Union militants, than there is among students—which is paradoxical given the student composition of PD. Our differences with the Dublin students are partly caused by misinformation, partly to our inadequate analysis of the situation in the South and partly because in the North we have much more contact with the working class than student bodies in the South which are purely university based.

*McCann.* The real reason why we are having trouble with our comrades in the South, comes back once again to the fact that there is no one single organization to which they and we belong. Our only means of contact with the South is telephone calls to people we happen to know personally, so of course there is confusion about what we and they are doing.

*Toman.* There is a very promising Civil Rights movement in the West of Ireland, in Galway, which is an acutely depressed area, as well as some action in the East—especially a militant housing action committee in Dublin. But I am inclined to think that Civil Rights is only a label in the East of the 26 counties, and that the traditional forms of agitation are the way to get things going there.

*What was your calculation when you participated in the Stormont elections?*

*Farrell.* The decision to participate in the Stormont elections was very simple, and didn't involve us in any great problems. The election represented a Gaullist-type strategy on the part of O'Neill. He staged a election to frighten the bourgeoisie and the farmers in an attempt to produce a consensus which would bring the Catholic and Protestant middle classes behind him in a policy of reforming capitalism—thus completely isolating the Catholic working class, who were just beginning to stir. We participated in the election to smash this consensus, and in order to destroy (particularly among the Catholics who were very vulnerable to this) the notion that O'Neill's reforms would meet our demands. Our participation in the election was very successful from that point of view.

We stood on a radical civil rights platform, which was a socialist platform, which included the demand for workers' control, and it involved us very little in the way of electoral compromise. Further we chose seats which we were most unlikely to win, as we had no desire or intention of winning any seats, and we would have been gravely embarrassed if we had won any.

*Are you embarrassed by Bernadette's victory now?*

*Toman.* It's difficult to answer that with Bernadette here.

*Devlin.* I think you should answer it.

*Toman.* We hoped Bernadette would win, we expected her to win and we encouraged her, very much against her own will, to stand. First because it is important to show people that they have, to use their own words, 'got up off their knees'. Secondly, because it is an excellent means of gaining publicity for the situation over here. Thirdly, because there was a terrible fear that if Bernadette didn't stand somebody much worse would (*laughter*). If I could explain that Austin Currey, who is at present a Nationalist MP at Stormont was a strong runner for the seat and would not have campaigned on an anti-sectarian platform. Fourthly, Bernadette brought to a lot of people for the first time the idea of a socialist republic.

Unfortunately part of the strategy may not have worked as Austin Currey may be the new MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

*Devlin.* That is not true, people were making it clear that they didn't want Austin Currey for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. They were aware of the fact that one of the reasons why he was willing to give up Mid-Ulster was that it might strengthen his chances there. The peasants of Mid-Ulster may not be particularly bright in the eyes of the *New Left Review*, but they know a political opportunist when they see one, and Austin Currey has a big X after his name.

*Farrell.* I am worried about two aspects of the electoral campaign in Mid-Ulster. The first is that Nationalist MP's did speak on Bernadette's election platform, which clearly was a grave embarrassment. These people are Green Tories, they are Capitalists and they are Catholic Sectarians and even their so-called left wingers are as much our enemy as the Unionist Party. It was very dangerous to allow them to speak, it could have totally distorted the candidature in the minds of the Protestants as one which represented Catholics alone—an attempt, in other words, to bring Catholics to power over the heads of Protestants. These people participated more or less on Bernadette's terms, which improves things slightly, but it would have been much better if they had not been there at all.

Secondly, the platform should have been a clearly socialist one and not one which emphasized *unity* in terms which could only mean unity of all classes within one creed rather than the unity of one class regardless of creed.

*Devlin.* It did not work out that way in the end. Brookeborough, the grand old Protestant himself, said that we had gained quite a lot, in his opinion far too many, Protestant votes. I was not worried about the recognizable Nationalists; by having them on the platform we effectively destroyed both Tommy Gormley and Buddy O'Connor, the

Nationalist mp's for Mid and West Tyrone. Currey, it is true, was more difficult to deal with. Further the Protestants who voted for me could only have done so on a socialist basis; the platform was therefore socialist.

The reasons that Catholics who are not Socialists voted for me is that they did not want the Unionists to win. I agree that this is unfortunate, but I have no doubt that within a year these people will do their best to destroy me, and possibly may succeed. Within a year we will have sorted out the Catholics who voted for us on a purely Catholic basis and we will still have the support of the Protestants who supported us on a socialist basis, therefore we will have established the normal situation of the socialists supporting us and the non-socialists pulling out. As they are already.

*Farrell.* I'm worried about two points. During the election Currey's speeches emphasized sectarian rather than class issues, and since the election he has been emphasizing the unity of all anti-Unionist parties, which in practice means unity of all Catholics against Protestants. So this election may have aided the idea of Pan-Catholic unity, which is a concept we must destroy. Secondly, by putting up and supporting Bernadette we may have given credence to bourgeois parliamentary politics and given people false hopes, while at the same time Bernadette is swallowed up in Parliamentary procedures, which would demoralize and reduce support for the non-sectarian part of the platform which was put forward.

*Devlin.* This is quite unfair to my victory rally speech. Despite the fact that all of you supported me in getting into the bourgeois Parliament, very few of you remained for the final scene of my crucifixion. When all the Pan-Catholics turned up to celebrate, it was really too much for the good socialists. In my speech after I was elected, I made it quite clear that if people thought that by sending me to Westminster, I or anyone else was capable of doing anything for them there they were quite mistaken. I said that all I could do was prove, by trying, that nothing could be done in such a parliament and that in a very short space of time I would be back to call them out of the factories, and if they were not at that stage prepared to come then they should leave my victory rally and trot off to join all the people who thought they could do something by parliamentary methods. But most of them were so glad they just swallowed it all anyway.

*Farrell.* The points that I am trying to make cannot be covered by a speech. The danger of being swallowed by parliamentarism requires constant vigilance and a clearly worked out socialist strategy towards a bourgeois parliament, using parliament as a sounding box and as only one section of an activity which is mainly extra-parliamentary. This is a matter which must be decided on as a matter of great priority.

*Do you have any initial plans as to how you are going to use Parliament as a sounding-box?*

*Devlin.* I have less faith in the whole thing than anybody who put me into the job in the first place. I will undoubtedly be treated with courtesy, I will be allowed, as a good little baby of Parliament, to make my maiden speech undisturbed, and then I will be told to behave like a good child and say nothing more. I won't accept this and I will probably spend most of my time working among the people of Mid-Ulster and working in the streets of London where I feel much more at home.

*Farrell.* The question of how one treats Westminster raises the much more serious theoretical issue of what demands we make of Westminster and of Britain as Irish Socialists working for a Socialist Republic.

*McCann.* By the way are we all aware that British troops were called in about an hour ago to guard key installations here?

*Farrell.* Well, that merely underscores the imperialist situation of Northern Ireland. The point I was making was that we must reject the idea of Westminster intervening to secure reform in Northern Ireland. We do not want reform of Northern Ireland, we want a revolution in Ireland and we will not get that by any Westminster intervention. The role of an MP at Westminster should be to mobilize Irish immigrants in England, and to campaign against both Irish bourgeois States, exposing emigration from Ireland as one of their most serious contradictions, and emphasizing the right of the Irish to have a job and a home in Ireland itself.

*Devlin.* That is what I have been advocating. Much to the horror of everybody on the press, I made a simple statement that when the Westminster Parliament refuses to listen and act, I will go to the people who have been forced out of Ireland and work among them.

*McCann.* Obviously, no one here imagines that our problems could be solved by intervention from Westminster. But an awful lot of our supporters do see such intervention as a means of solving the problems over which we have been agitating. It is necessary to go to Westminster to demand the solution to these problems to show that Westminster is a farce, and that we will have to do it ourselves.

*Farrell.* There is one positive aspect to the chaotic nature of the whole scene here, that it has brought a lot of people into action who would not have been won to socialism by any programme. This very discussion has illustrated the need too for a radical socialist Party, but equally it has shown that we cannot form any high level organization, as we do not yet have the theoretical basis for any clearly determined policies, in fact we have not even discussed some elementary problems. What we need to form at the moment is some sort of alliance to develop a theoretical analysis of our struggle in the North, as well as to carry out

systematic agitation & work.

*What sort of international solidarity action is of greatest assistance to you, in particular from comrades in England, Scotland and Wales?*

*Devlin.* At the risk of offending our comrades in the rest of the United Kingdom I think that there is very little that they can do at this stage because they simply do not understand the mentality or the basic personality of the Irish people. In particular, the small farmers have a radical tradition, as Mike was just saying, but they do not like you using doctrinaire terms, and the workers will spell out workers' control for you, but they don't like you trying to do it for them.

*Toman.* Break up Ulster weeks, launch an attack on O'Neill and 'liberal Unionism', help organize the Paddies, the Irish immigrants, and raise money for PD.

*Baxter.* There was only one time historically that English workers could really have helped and that was the general strike of 1913. Then they failed to show solidarity in blacking cargoes from Ireland. If there were any comparable industrial action today, we would need help from across the water.

*What is your attitude to the demands that some English comrades have put forward for an end to British Aid to Ulster?*

*McCann.* They are very bad. They imply that the Protestants are white sahibs and that this is a colonial state. Ulster is *not* just a colonial state; it is in many respects, though not in all respects, an ordinary bourgeois state. The subsidies do not support a privileged layer of the population. The Catholic working class have a lot of children and receive a lot of state benefits. These sorts of demands may appear to be formally justified. But at ground level they are not effective. You can't demand them in Britain and not demand them here, and if you go to the most militant section of the working class and demand that family allowances be stopped you are not going to get very far. The whole national question comes in here but the simple fact of it is that you can't go down to Bogside and advocate that British subsidies are withdrawn.

*Farrell.* The Irish Socialist Republic cannot be built in isolation. The old rule is true; the best way English comrades can help the Irish revolution is by making the English revolution. And the second best way they can do this is by not misunderstanding the Irish revolution as a simple national struggle against colonialism or a simple struggle of the Catholic peasants against the Protestant landlords. Because it is much more complex than that, and they should get the complexity of the situation here into their heads.

*Interviewer A.B.—April 20 1969.*

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