

# Ireland: Unifying a divided working class

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More than two decades after the signing of the Good Friday Agreement, the 'national question' in Ireland is once again moving centre-stage. Demographic changes in the North, Brexit, as well as the rise of Sinn Féin in the South are all combining to drive this process.

The national question poses innumerable questions to socialists struggling to unite the working class, North and South, and end the capitalist system. We are grappling today with the effects, 100 years on, of the "carnival of reaction"<sup>1</sup> foreseen by James Connolly as a result of the partition of Ireland by British imperialism.

Since the launch of RISE, we have debated what position the socialist movement should advocate and how we should put forward a socialist answer to the national question in Ireland. This article contains some of the conclusions of that discussion, in particular relating to how socialists should respond to a border poll. [[1](#)]

## A brief history of national oppression

The national question is Marxist jargon for an unresolved issue of national oppression. For example, there are multiple national questions in the Spanish state, including the oppression of the Basque and Catalan peoples. Recognition that a national question exists is not the same, however, as identifying precisely what the issue is. Each national question has its own features.

Most Marxist theorisations of imperialism dealt primarily with colonial empires of the sort that were at their zenith in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Other writings about the national questions dealt primarily with European countries which had been incorporated within larger states through various forms of feudal dynastic politics. The national question in Ireland, as it developed over centuries, had features of both.<sup>2</sup>

The first 'British' (although actually predating the concept of Britain) incursion was the Anglo-Norman invasion of 1169, designed to prevent Ireland being used as a base from which to foment rebellion against the feudal monarchy. Over the following centuries, while territorial control was maintained over 'the Pale' (the area including Dublin and surrounding areas), the Normans largely

assimilated into Gaelic culture elsewhere on the island. This was followed by the Tudor-Stuart conquest, which succeeded in re-establishing direct control of all of Ireland by the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. A part of this was the beginning of a brutal policy of “clearance and plantation” whereby land was confiscated from Irish Chiefs and sold off at auction to English landlords. The Plantation of Ulster was the largest and most successful plantation, aimed at establishing a reliable and loyal population amongst mostly Scottish Protestant settlers.

When the monarchy and the Catholic Church, which was at the centre of feudal reaction, were defeated in the English Revolution<sup>3</sup>, England was established as an essentially capitalist economy. Oliver Cromwell founded and led the New Model Army, which played a decisive role in defeating the Royalists. In 1649 he drove a brutal new conquest of Ireland, which was largely controlled by the Irish Catholic Federation, which allied with the Royalists. The Catholic landowning class was dispossessed and the Catholic population was consistently discriminated against. By 1775, while Catholics made up two-thirds of the population, they were reduced to five percent of the land. Christopher Hill described the Cromwellian conquest as “the first big triumph of English imperialism and the first big defeat of English democracy”.<sup>4</sup>

Ireland developed from that point as a peculiar colony of a capitalist Britain, functioning as a very underdeveloped backward part of the United Kingdom, becoming the ‘Granary of Britain’, with large exports of grain. These continued even during the Great Famine from 1845 to 1849, which saw over one million people die. As James Connolly put it, “all of these were sacrificed upon the altar of capitalist thought”.<sup>5</sup> A notable exception to this underdevelopment was the north-east of Ireland, which saw real industrial development around Belfast in particular.

Inspired by the American and French Revolutions, and with material aid from the latter, Irish people rose up in repeated attempts to end colonial rule (and their oppression), coming closest to success with the 1798 rebellion of the United Irishmen, which succeeded in uniting Catholics and Protestants under the leadership of Wolfe Tone.



Confronted with its near defeat, British strategy shifted towards first uniting Anglicans and Presbyterians in a common Protestant bloc, and then consciously creating division between Protestants and Catholics to prevent the re-emergence of such a united movement again. This was encapsulated in the Act of Union of 1801 which continued to bar Catholics from public office and ruled out ‘Catholic emancipation’. It did not prevent repeated attempts at uprisings throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and again with the Easter Rising in 1916. As the demands for ‘Home Rule’ (a form of devolution of power) mounted, the Tories in particular decided that “the Orange card would be the one to play”, in the words of Lord Randolph Churchill.<sup>6</sup>

In the aftermath of the Russian Revolution, British imperialism was faced with an Irish revolutionary movement which didn’t just pose the possibility of national liberation, but also placed questions of class relations on the agenda. The spread of workers’ militancy, workplace and land occupations, and events like the general strike against conscription in 1918 and the Limerick Soviet of 1919, struck fear into the heart of the British government. The failure of the labour movement to challenge the leadership of the middle-class nationalists of Sinn Féin, with the effective acceptance of the idea

that 'Labour must wait', unfortunately meant the potential of that period was not met.

In response to this threat, however, British imperialism, as well as attempting to militarily defeat and repress the movements it faced, pursued the strategy of divide and rule ever more cynically. They moved to partition Ireland in 1920, and insisted on that partition in the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. That period of Irish revolution closed in 1922 with a counter-revolution which saw the founding of the 'Free State' as a reactionary Catholic church-dominated society, where anti-treaty Republicans and socialists were executed without trial, subversive literature was banned and women were pushed out of any participation in public life. North of the border, open discrimination and oppression of the Catholic minority was the norm, with a sectarian Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), as well as paramilitary Loyalist groups, and 'gerry-mandering' of electoral constituencies to minimise Catholic representation.

In the South, a weak capitalist class and their political representatives continued to rest on the authority of the Catholic Church, while acting to facilitate the exploitation of people and resources by foreign capital, initially British and later American and European. In the North, systematic discrimination continued, with housing proving the flashpoint which sparked the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.



Any potential for a united class movement on civil and economic rights was thrown away by the conservative nationalist leaders, who preferred "anti-Unionist unity" (i.e. Catholic unity) to class unity. When Civil Rights protests were violently attacked by loyalist gangs, protected by the RUC, and peaceful protesters were shot dead by British paratroopers on Bloody Sunday, a significant section of Catholic youth, fed up with oppression, and without a seemingly viable class-based socialist movement, turned to armed struggle with the Provisional IRA. Considering the situation they faced, it was understandable that young Catholics would want to fight back. However, the IRA campaign was always a dead end. While it was fundamentally different from the overtly sectarian campaigns of loyalist paramilitaries, it could not militarily defeat the British state and the effect of it was to deepen sectarian division.

The Good Friday Agreement which brought an end to the Troubles didn't solve the national question or end the deep division in Northern society. The power sharing agreement only papered over the historic divide between communities, while institutionalising sectarianism at


the top. The leading political parties on both sides of the divide would unite to implement neo-liberal policies of cuts and privatisation, while portraying themselves as the best representatives of the communal interests of 'their' community to win re-election.

## **What is the national question today?**

Without the actions of British imperialism over centuries, there would be no national question in Ireland. In particular, the partition of Ireland is responsible for the specific form the national question presents itself today. However, a consequence of the actions of British imperialism is the existence today of two distinct communities in the North with conflicting national aspirations.

Catholics were historically and consistently discriminated against within the Northern state by right-wing unionist politicians and a British state which was happy to rest on the support of a Protestant majority. Although active economic discrimination is now largely in the past, residues of it remain. Even if every last remnant of discrimination in employment or housing were to disappear, Catholics would remain without doubt nationally oppressed, as their wish to be in a country which is in line with their national identity is obstructed and they are imprisoned within a Northern state they don't identify with.

Because of the exclusion of Catholics from large parts of industry, it was Protestants who historically occupied the big majority of skilled and unionised jobs. This preferential access to skilled jobs and, in the field of social reproduction, housing, formed part of the historical basis for the unionist political bloc. However, theories which treat Protestants as a super-privileged 'labour aristocracy', or worse still as 'settlers' equivalent to white South Africans, have no basis in material fact. Protestant working-class people, even when Catholics were suffering direct discrimination in terms of housing and jobs, also suffered from some of the highest rates of poverty and deprivation across the UK, encapsulated by the dire conditions on both the Shankill and Falls Roads in Belfast.



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It was not economic advantage alone which was effective in binding a section of workers to the British state, it was unionist ideology. However, the divide and rule approach of capitalism and the British state broke down at crucial moments when powerful joint struggles of Catholic and Protestant workers overcame division, like with the 1919 Belfast Engineers Strike and the 1930s movement against unemployment. Many more contemporary, if more modest, examples of such joint struggle are available - like the powerful public sector strike in 2015. They demonstrate the power of united working-class struggle and the potential for it to be redeveloped, cutting across the sectarian divisions on which the ruling class and the establishment parties depend.

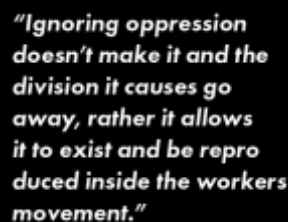
However, the persistence of these divisions and their capacity to be exploited by a cynical and ruthless capitalist class despite these struggles is also clear. The 1919 Engineers Strike, which had important elements of a general strike, was followed by a period of anti-Catholic pogroms in 1920, consciously whipped up by employers eager to avoid a repeat of 1919. It saw the expulsion of up to 7,000 Catholics and 3,000 so-called "rotten Prods", Protestant socialists and trade unionists, from workplaces.

## Socialist approaches to the national question

In working out how to address this division, it is worth reflecting on the contributions of Marxists about how to answer the national question. While Marx and Engels outlined a clear internationalist principle with their stirring message that the working class “has no country”<sup>7</sup> and even anticipated Lenin’s later programmatic innovations with their support for independence for Ireland and Poland, they fell significantly short of outlining a comprehensive approach. Engels, in particular, introduced a confused and non-materialist concept of “non-historic nations”.

Unsurprisingly, this complicated issue was therefore the subject of lively debates within the socialist movement after their deaths. Within the so-called ‘Second International’, the right-wing advocated for a form of ‘socialist colonialism’, with horrifically racist argumentation epitomised by Eduard Bernstein’s argument at the Stuttgart Congress of 1907 that “socialists too should acknowledge the need for civilized peoples to act somewhat like guardians of the uncivilized”.<sup>9</sup>

While the right’s motion was defeated at the Stuttgart Congress by a bloc of the centre and left, the fact that it only lost narrowly, by 127 votes to 108, illustrates both the opportunism already present within Social Democracy as well as the lack of clarity about how to approach this issue. Even amongst those who clearly opposed colonialism, there was often a sort of oppression-blind approach. This was epitomised by Eugene Debs in relation to racial oppression, when he wrote “we have nothing special to offer the Negro, and we cannot make appeals to all the races. The Socialist Party is the party of the working class, regardless of color — the whole working class of the whole world”.<sup>10</sup>



*“Ignoring oppression doesn’t make it and the division it causes go away, rather it allows it to exist and be reproduced inside the workers movement.”*

In contrast, Lenin insisted that the Marxist movement must have something “special” to offer black people in the US, and oppressed nationalities worldwide. This something “special” is nothing other than a firm commitment to ending their particular oppression (in all its forms, regardless of class), which is above and beyond the exploitation and oppression of all working-class people inherent to capitalism.

He recognised that unity of the working class could not be built by ignoring or downplaying those forms of oppression which affect particular groups rather than all workers universally. Ignoring oppression doesn’t make it, and the division it causes, go away, rather it allows it to exist and be reproduced inside the working-class movement. Instead, he argued for unity to be created on the basis of an explicit opposition to oppression and a commitment to end it.

It is from this analysis, that the advocacy of the right to self-determination came to the fore. It was a tool by which the working class of the oppressing nation would demonstrate that they had no interest in continuing oppression and to assist in the building of united working-class struggle. It also facilitated revolutionaries within an oppressed nation taking up the fight against imperialism, while seeking to connect the struggle against oppression to the need for socialist change.

The Bolsheviks made clear that the people of Georgia, Poland, Ukraine, Finland and all other nations

historically oppressed by Tsarist Russia had the right to determine their own future, up to and including the right to independence. In the context of a Tsarist empire made up of multiple nationalities, with a majority of non-Russians, this was crucial in the struggle to win mass support. As Trotsky put it in his History of the Russian Revolution, “only in this way could the Russian proletariat gradually win the confidence of the oppressed nationalities.”<sup>11</sup>

## **Applying Lenin’s method to Ireland**

This represented a real breakthrough in terms of how socialists should engage with national (and other) oppressions and informs the approach we seek to take today. However, the ‘right to self-determination’ slogan cannot simply be applied to any given situation and expected to be the answer. In an Irish context, who precisely is entitled to self-determination? The Irish people as a whole? The Catholics in the North, or the Protestants, or both? How could it actually be exercised?

Attempting to address the national question in Ireland through focusing on this question brought the left down an analytical cul de sac of schematic thinking based on assessing which group of people meets the definition of a ‘nation’. They could start with a list of criteria as infamously provided by Stalin, a man who would later subject entire oppressed nationalities to deportation, in ‘Marxism and the National Question’: “common language, common territory, common economic life and common psychological make-up [whatever that means!] manifested in a common culture”.<sup>12</sup> Using such a list, Marxists would then decide whether a particular group of people qualifies as a nation or not.



This mechanical approach doesn’t really help us understand national oppression as it exists in the world that we actually face, as opposed to under some imaginary laboratory conditions. For example, the Kurdish people would not qualify as a nation under Stalin’s definition, because they do not have a “common economic life”. Yet it would appear self-evident to most Marxists that Kurds do constitute a nation with the right to self-determination.

Instead of repeating these mistakes, we should utilise the fundamental method underlying the ‘right to self-determination’ concept, rather than the formula itself. In other words, seeking to find a way to unite the working class, despite its real divisions, and point a way forward for it to take power, whereby it could resolve the national question. That means analysing political realities which exist and relating to them, rather than engaging in historical argumentation as to who constitutes a nation or not. As Trotsky put it when discussing the oppression of black people in the US, “an abstract criterion is not decisive in this case: much more decisive are historical consciousness, feelings and emotions”.<sup>13</sup>

Nations are not immutable ahistorical categories but groups that are constantly in a process of composition, decomposition and recomposition. The very make-up of what is generally accepted as the Irish nation is proof of that, with waves of settlers becoming integrated into what became the



Irish nation over time.

Very clearly the vast majority of Northern Protestants do not identify as part of the Irish nation, with only a tiny minority in various surveys identifying as simply Irish. While not a stand-alone nation, they constitute a distinct community, with different national aspirations than people in the South and Catholics in the North. Northern Catholics are not a stand-alone nation, but rather are part of the Irish nation, including the vast majority of people in the South.

Another political reality is that, given the geographic and demographic facts of the North, the exercise of the right to self-determination of Protestants or Catholics would mean the denial of self-determination to the other. The two communities are interpenetrated across the north-east of Ireland in such a way that there is no re-division possible which would not imprison substantial minorities within a state they don't identify with.

### **Can capitalism solve the national question in Ireland?**

Precisely because the national question in Ireland involves the existence of two distinct communities in the North, it is an intractable question. If the question was simply one of the British army's presence in the North, then it could be solved relatively easily through its withdrawal. But it's not. The result of a century of partition and division in the interests of capital, means these separate communities and identities have a real existence that cannot be switched on and off as it suits British imperialism.

However, it does not follow from this, as some would argue, that the form in which the national question is posed cannot be changed within capitalism. Indeed, the form of various national questions around the world has changed repeatedly. We are in a time of enormous flux, but with a weakly positioned working class in terms of class consciousness, mass organisation and leadership and therefore often unable to put its stamp on events decisively.



There are many possible outcomes within the framework of capitalism. We should not underestimate the potential for a violent backlash in opposition to the reunification of Ireland by a section of the Protestant population, the redevelopment of a significant sectarian conflict and even possibly spilling over into civil war. It is not the only variant, however, and alternatives where the pressure of working-class people as well as the interests of the capitalist states involved are sufficient to avoid such an all-out civil war, while not being sufficient to pose the question of a workers' revolution, are also possible.

In those situations, a united Ireland on a capitalist basis may become a possibility. Mid-way solutions, such as joint authority of the Irish and British government for a defined period may also come onto the agenda. Instead of being prescriptive about what can theoretically happen within the

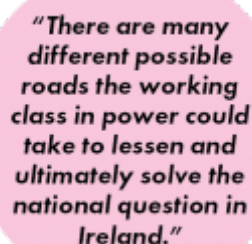
framework of capitalism, we should be open about what might transpire.

However, any of those 'solutions' in the framework of capitalism will not make the national question go away. Discrimination or at least a dynamic of communalised competition over the allocation of scarce resources (housing and public services for example) at a local Council or devolved Assembly level is likely. In any case, even without direct discrimination, community identity is not something which is quickly erased or forgotten. Protestants would be a definite minority community in a state they don't identify with.

## **Working class could solve the national question**

It isn't just wishful thinking to suggest that if the working class was in control, things would be different. Firmly in control of resources, with democratic input from workers in all communities, a socialist society would lay the basis for the withering away of national conflict over time because of two crucial factors.

Firstly, by ensuring everybody had access to a decent standard of living, with quality jobs, housing and public services, it would largely eliminate the struggles between different sections of the working class over inadequate resources. These struggles, and the willingness of the capitalist class in power to exploit them is a crucial factor in the exacerbation of national conflicts.



***"There are many different possible roads the working class in power could take to lessen and ultimately solve the national question in Ireland."***

Secondly, with the starting point of the recognition of the rights of national minorities, up to and including the right to self-determination, as well as struggling for working-class unity, the working class in power would be able to satisfy what are currently conflicting rights and aspirations. Yugoslavia, as well as providing an example of the genocidal ways national questions can erupt, also gives an example of how a workers' state (even one deformed by Stalinism) could attenuate national conflicts. Under Tito, with economic growth, and autonomy for the nations that made up Yugoslavia, the national question was mitigated. Of course, the re-emergence of the national question in Yugoslavia, with the bloody break-up of that state proves that these questions were not 'solved' under Stalinism, they were simply attenuated for a period of time.

There are many different possible roads the working class in power could take to lessen and ultimately solve the national question in Ireland. The simplest and easiest of those solutions is one socialist state in Ireland, connected to the development of a socialist movement across Europe. This would be a state the Protestant minority would have played a role in fighting for and building and within which it suffers no discrimination and has full democratic rights.

Over time, Northern Protestants could come to think of themselves as fully part of the Irish nation, like Protestants in the South. Other solutions, including autonomy for the Northern Protestant community within a socialist Ireland, or autonomy for a north-eastern region of Ireland, are also



possible and it will be up to the future working class in building a united struggle against capitalism and once in power to democratically decide how to resolve this issue.

The key question for us is how we unify the working class today against the capitalist class in such a way as to pose the possibility of the working class taking power and having the opportunity to resolve the national question. Our analysis and strategy for the way forward therefore must recognise and oppose the existing national oppression of Northern Catholics, while also giving reassurance to Northern Protestants that not only do they have nothing to fear in a future socialist state, they have much to gain.

## **Border poll**

Demographic change within Northern Ireland is the largest single factor in changing the way the national question is posed and perceived. The fact that within a few years, those from a Catholic background will likely make up a greater percentage of the population in the North than those from a Protestant background is of huge significance. Already in 2016, there were more people of working age from a Catholic background (44%) than a Protestant one (40%). Amongst school students, the gap is even larger with 51% from a Catholic background compared to 37% from a Protestant one.

The very basis of the Northern state since its foundation has been as a state with a Protestant (and presumed unionist) majority, and a Catholic minority. The ending of that Protestant majority, and the clear demographic trend towards a Catholic majority undermines the basis of the Northern state.

What's more, this demographic fact has a legal significance in the Good Friday Agreement. It contains a clause instructing the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland to direct the holding of a poll "if at any time it appears likely to him that a majority of those voting would express a wish that Northern Ireland should cease to be part of the United Kingdom and form part of a united Ireland." Simultaneous to this would be an equivalent poll in the south of Ireland.

If the 2021 census indicates a higher percentage of Catholics than Protestants, the pressure for the calling of a border poll will build substantially. It seems very likely that within a decade, the opinion polls will indicate that a border poll should be triggered.



Even before a border poll is required to be called, however, it (and the national question generally) will rise in the political agenda. Apart from the ticking demographic clock, the rise of Sinn Féin in the South gives added momentum to this process. In opposition, they have consistently tried to utilise Brexit as an opportunity to push Irish unification to the fore. If they go into a right-wing government with Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael, they would undoubtedly use the opportunity to push for a border poll, both because it is a core part of their political existence as well as to distract from their likely role in managing capitalism and implementing austerity. This is precisely what they have done

in the North already.

Brexit and a new Scottish referendum for independence are additional factors influencing the discussion and trajectory of the national question in Ireland. The British state in general is on a path towards disintegration. Britain exiting the EU has underscored the relative decline in the position of British imperialism, as well as sharply posing the question of the positioning of a hardened border - either between the South and North of Ireland, or between Ireland as a whole and Britain.

On the one hand, these conditions have the potential to reinforce a sense within Protestant working-class communities of being under siege from an increasingly confident Catholic population. On the other hand, if Catholics sense that their aspirations to be part of a united Ireland will be blocked by the British state or others even in circumstances where they will be a majority, despite the fact the Good Friday Agreement is clear about what should happen, the result may be explosive.

The political terrain on this island is incredibly challenging. Nevertheless, charting a path forward means addressing the political situation as it is, not as we would wish it to be. From the complicated starting point of today, socialists must formulate an approach to oppose oppression and unify the working class in a struggle against capitalist exploitation and for socialist change.

### **What should socialists say about a border poll?**

The border poll is in many ways the sharpest way the national question is posed to us today. A referendum on both sides of the border with a Yes/No answer (or the possibility of abstention) does not allow for evasions or long-winded answers. It cannot be answered simply with reference to the socialist solution we favour. It will require a concrete answer. In developing a programme to unite the working class and fight to overthrow capitalism, how we respond to a border poll is crucial.



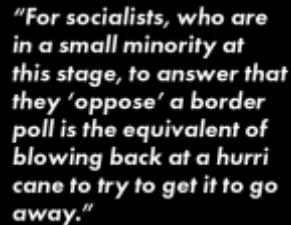
A border poll under the Good Friday Agreement is not our response to the national question, just as the Good Friday Agreement was not our response to the sectarian conflict in the North. It is a 'solution' created by the political parties and capitalist states, and contains many dangers from the point of view of a struggle to unite the working class and defeat imperialism and capitalism.

However, it exists both legally and, as a consequence of that legal existence, politically as a reference point for people from Catholic communities seeking to end their national oppression. Socialists should recognise that it is entirely reasonable that Catholics in the North, having been forced into a state that oppresses them on the basis that they are a minority, would expect their oppression to come to an end upon becoming a majority. The border poll is already seen to be, and is likely to be more and more seen in this way, the most obvious means by which to achieve this.

On the other hand, for working-class Protestants, a border poll is viewed with trepidation. This is both for the increase in sectarian tension that might arise around it, and because of the

consequences of a Yes vote meaning that they are forced into a state that they want no part of.

The possibility of this becoming a turning point for a descent into sectarian violence and clashes is real. However, for socialists, who are in a small minority at this stage, to answer that they 'oppose' a border poll is the equivalent of blowing back at a hurricane to try to get it to go away. This is coming whether we like it or not, and socialists have to engage with it.



*"For socialists, who are in a small minority at this stage, to answer that they 'oppose' a border poll is the equivalent of blowing back at a hurricane to try to get it to go away."*

To oppose a border poll, or to advocate an abstention or boycott of a poll if called, would not be a strategy to unite any significant section of the working class and point the way forward to power. Worse, it would amount to commenting from the side-lines. It would leave the field clear for nationalists on both sides to take the lead in shaping the discussion and outcome.

Socialists therefore should recognise the political reality that a border poll is coming. Instead of creating a barrier between them and the majority of working class people on this island by 'opposing' it, they should seek to intervene to shape the terms of the debate and the outcome.

### **Independent working-class campaign**

The border poll will not resolve the national question and we shouldn't pretend that it will. In fact, as outlined above, it has the capacity to exacerbate sectarianism and tensions between the communities. However, we cannot say to Catholics, who from a position of minority are set to become a majority, you must accept this status quo until the struggle for socialism is ready to resolve the national question.

Instead, we should support the holding of a border poll both as a democratic right and a mechanism for Catholics to end their national oppression. We should take a side on the concrete question of the border poll - in line with the wishes of the substantial majority of working-class people in Ireland, and with a broadly progressive content for most - in favour of re-unification of the island. In doing so, we put ourselves in a much better position to make our broader arguments in favour of the necessity of socialist change, including placing an emphasis on the rights of the Protestant minority.

While supporting such a poll and calling for a Yes vote, socialists must strike a warning note about the dangers contained within it. It contains significant dangers of increasing tension and even open conflict in the run-up to and aftermath of such a poll. Even if it was held and passed, it may simply change the dynamic of oppression, with Protestants feeling coerced into a state that they do not identify with, in circumstances of heightened communal tension.

To avoid these outcomes requires the building of an anti-sectarian campaign based on Catholic and Protestant working-class communities, independent of the nationalist forces, including Sinn Féin who will be advocating for a border poll and a Yes vote. In the South, socialists have a particular duty to raise awareness about Protestant fears about being an oppressed minority within a unified state, explaining the concerns they have to lose not only their identity, but also public services

superior to those in the South. We need to emphasise the need to protect the rights of the Protestant minority, as well as other minorities, within that state.

It should advocate clearly not for the unifying of two capitalist and sectarian states, but the creation of a secular and socialist Ireland, within which the rights of Protestants, including the continuing right to dual citizenship, would be protected. Instead of the downward harmonisation of corporation tax envisaged by Sinn Féin, and the creation of an all Ireland tax haven, we should advocate the democratic public ownership of the key sources of wealth across the island, using them to guarantee a quality National Health Service across the island, investment in decent public housing and services for all, and dramatic improvements in people's standard of living.

This socialist change cannot be sustained on the island of Ireland alone. It must be part of an international movement to end the rule of the capitalist class and take power into the hands of working-class people. A crucial part of that is the building of a democratic socialist Europe, which would include close co-operation and relations with working-class people across the continent.

### **Paul Murphy**

#### *Notes*

1. James Connolly, 'Labour and Partition' (1914).
2. The brief history outlined here is mostly drawn from T.A. Jackson, 'Ireland Her Own' (1946), and D. R. O'Connor Lysaght, 'British Imperialism in Ireland', contained in 'Ireland: Divided Nation, Divided Class' (1987).
3. For further reading, Christopher Hill, 'The English Revolution 1640' (1940).
4. Christopher Hill, 'The English Revolution 1640' (1940).
5. James Connolly, 'Labour in Irish History' (1910).
6. Letter to Lord Justice Fitzgibbon (16 February 1886).
7. Marx and Engels, 'Communist Manifesto' (1848).
8. Further reading, Michael Lowy, Marxists and the National Question (New Left Review).
9. p. 40 ed. John Riddell, 'Lenin's Struggle for a Revolutionary International' (2002).
10. Eugene V. Debs, 'The Negro In the Class Struggle' (1903).
11. Leon Trotsky, 'History of the Russian Revolution' (1930).
12. Joseph Stalin, 'Marxism and the National Question' (1913).

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### **P.S.**

• Article originally published in Issue 2 of Rupture, Ireland's eco-socialist quarterly. January 27, 2021 :

## Footnotes

[1] \* The terms Protestant and Catholic will be used throughout this article as shorthand for people coming from Protestant and Catholic communities. Although this language choice presents problems, not least the implication that in some way this is a 'religious' conflict, the alternative of describing people as nationalist and unionist applies political labels to people purely based on their background and fails to capture the communal nature of sectarian division.