

Editorial

Let's not hail Britannia!

The reunification of Ireland is that much closer because of President Clinton's intervention. This has been a cause for rejoicing by the Irish everywhere, while the British have struck a consistently sour note. Considering their long history of crimes against the Irish, they might consider that they are getting off easy.

The British role in fostering violence in Northern Ireland is well documented. This has given them a pretext for maintaining their control, and preventing the reunification of Ireland. To do otherwise would unseat families who have held dominant positions in the area over the centuries of British rule, and would destabilize an important part of the British conservative power base.

In 1926, Ireland became a republic after more than 300 years of British oppression, and at the cost of allowing Northern Ireland to remain under British control. Since 1973, Northern Ireland has been ruled as a military dictatorship directly from London, although Protestants from Northern Ireland are elected to the British Parliament and are a mainstay of the Tory government.

It is good to remember that the United Kingdom, so-called, is united in name only. In reality, it is the shards of empire. Yes, finally, India gained its freedom, and the nations of the Commonwealth are theoretically independent of London, but what, after all, is the political entity known as the United Kingdom? One can hardly call it a bastion of freedom, as anyone who has travelled to Northern Ireland immediately recognizes.

The Catholic population there is brutally repressed—jobs, decent housing, and even police protection against arbitrary violence are denied them as a matter of policy—and this has engendered a climate in which violence characterizes daily life. The Protestant population of the area has suffered, too, under conditions in which terrorism has been fostered and allowed to run rampant.

Indeed, Scotland and Wales, which are part of the so-called United Kingdom, were themselves conquered nations, and suffered a brutal British occupa-

tion; this is reflected in the consciousness of the Welsh and Scots to this day. It is not much of an exaggeration to compare England with Russia in this regard, which also expanded its borders through conquering other nations such as Ukraine.

Now, British Prime Minister John Major is hysterical because of the President Clinton's success in negotiating a cease-fire from the Irish Republican Army as a first step in mediating the situation. For Major, this is an intolerable affront by an American President.

On the other hand, the Irish government has expressed its gratitude for President Clinton's extensive help in working for a solution to the problems of Northern Ireland. This is an issue of concern to Americans of Irish descent, but it should be an issue to everyone who is honestly concerned about the protection of human rights.

The partitioning of Ireland preceded the partitioning of Germany, Korea, Vietnam, and India, setting a precedent for the cavalier dismemberment of nations. Similarly, the fictitious entity Yugoslavia was created in defiance of the wishes of the Bosnian and Croatian peoples. Steps toward normalizing political rule in Northern Ireland, which could lead to reunification of Ireland, should be welcomed by all decent people.

As Ireland's Prime Minister Albert Reynolds said on Sept. 1 when he addressed the Dail (Ireland's parliament), the renunciation of violence by the Irish Republican Army is a historic opportunity "to take the gun out of Irish politics forever." Reynolds placed this opportunity in the context of similar moves to foster peace in the Middle East, South Africa, and eastern Europe.

The British establishment refuses to accept the possibility of peace rather than pacification for the Irish. Without British military rule, the establishment claims, the area will simply erupt into civil war. Agreement to a cease-fire by the Irish Republican Army can only be seen by them as a provocation.

For too long, the world has suffered under the pretensions to empire of the British ruling circles—not least the average British working person.