

NORTHERN IRELAND

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THE reform movement, initiated by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement in 1968, heralded the greatest political struggles seen in Ireland for over half-a-century. It also called forth all the evil reaction within the Unionist Party system, particularly evidenced by the August 1969 pogrom against the Catholic people of Belfast. The local Unionist Party, and the British Government, are unable to rule the area in the old way and it is obvious to competent political observers, since the phoney 'curfew' in the Lower Falls area of Belfast on July 3 to 5, 1970, broken by demonstrations of women on July 5 bringing food to upwards of 40,000 people beleaguered by some 4,000 British troops, that there exists *de facto* military rule: civil rule and civil law have been set aside.

It said much for the patience of the Social Democratic Labour Party, with six Members and constituting the official opposition at Stormont, that they had, for some months after the formation of the Party, attempted to work within the parliamentary framework; they had also refused to countenance efforts by the Civil Rights Association to break through bans imposed on civil rights marches, and had made it clear that violence was no part of their programme. They wanted to work within the 'constitutional framework' of the Government of Ireland Act and, whilst they believed that Ireland should be united, they would accept the decision of the majority on this question. They believed that, given the goodwill of the Government, the reform programme could be carried out.

They found themselves confronted by the realities of the situation: Unionist Party control, backed by a British Tory Government and 11,000 British troops, committed to keeping the facade of 'democratic rule', mainly to impress outside opinion. The situation had not changed: the opposition Members could cajole, wheedle, beseech or demand as the occasion called for inside parliament. Their voices, opinions, suggestions or strictures mattered as much, or as little, as such voices ever did since the parliament was established in 1920. The SDLP also found, after the excesses committed by the British troops in the homes of the people of Belfast during the phoney 'curfew' of July 1970, that they had precious few friends among the Labour MPs at Westminster. Mr Gerry Fitt, MP for

West Belfast, hastened to London on that occasion to complain of the troops' behaviour. He was listened to, in parliament, with anger from the Tory front bench and, one gathers, in very silent disapproval by the opposition front bench. It is not the done thing to criticise the British army. Mr Fitt must have been very chastened.

Neither in London nor in Belfast were the wheels of power turning in favour of a 'constitutional opposition' in Northern Ireland. What the SDLP Members did not appreciate at that time was that there cannot be a 'constitutional opposition' in an 'unconstitutional situation', where civil rule and civil law have, to all intents and purposes, been set aside in favour of military rule. It was, therefore, against a background of *de facto* military rule, accompanied by the shootings, riots, dawn searches of only Catholic homes, where the jails were full and hundreds awaiting trial and where the Government was showing the utmost reluctance to implement the reform programme in a way evident to those most aggrieved and only replied with more repressive legislation and calls for 'law and order', that the SDLP, and later the Nationalist Party, found that they had no other option than to withdraw their public representatives from the parliament, Senate and local authorities in order to expose the undemocratic nature of the state. It was still a 'Protestant parliament'. The SDLP announced that steps would be taken to set up an alternative Assembly.

The decision was welcomed by the Communist Party of Ireland in a statement issued on July 17 and which said:

The failure of both [Irish] states allied with, and pressurised by, this new direction of British monopoly capitalism (entry into the EEC) has stirred up all the contradictions within the two [Irish] states and has caused a crisis, both political and economic, of great depth which reveals the unstable foundations on which both are built. The failure and crisis have been of greater depth in the Six Counties. . . . There have been revealed all the contradictions, the dangers, but also the possibilities, for an advance by the Irish people to freedom from that citadel (i.e. British imperialism).

Mr Barry White, political commentator of the Belfast Telegraph, said, on July 22:

I know it is the customary thing to deplore utterly the action of the opposition in quitting Stormont, but on second, third and fourth thoughts, I'm not sure. . . . Since October 1968, it has been pretty obvious that Stormont was on its way out. Governments can only govern by consent, and Stormont only existed by the consent of the non-Unionist minority. It was a consent offered only because that minority accepted, through its cautious leadership, a permanently minor role. But it was withdrawn in Derry in 1968 . . . it has never really been re-established. The Stormont Government knew this; the

Westminster Government knew it. The Faulkner 'fair deal' policy was just about the last throw. . . . The final separation . . . can thus be seen as a mere formality . . . it was coming anyway.

Whilst all responsible parties and persons are demanding a political solution, the Faulkner Government and the Unionist Party want no political talks. They want only to have the same as before dished up in a different way. The Paisleyites and others are pressing for the reconstitution of the 'B' Specials, the rearming of the police, for internment and more repressive action by the British troops. (If the British troops are not willing to act as demanded, it is suggested that they get out of the way and let the 'defenders' of 'Ulster' get at the 'terrorists'.) They are also calling for a general election. Wm. Craig, President of the Ulster Loyalist Association and Unionist MP, has stated that if an election were called the Paisley Protestant Unionist Party would secure twelve seats and hold the balance of power. According to Craig, Prime Minister Faulkner's Government is only saved from a 'leadership crisis' by the parliamentary summer recess. 'Moderate Unionists' at Stormont have become as scarce as holy water in hell. Paisley has offered to do 'his duty', if necessary, and become Prime Minister. Not to be outdone in the 'loyalty stakes', the eight Unionist MPs at Westminster threaten to withdraw their support for the British Tory Government if they don't call up for service Northern Ireland's 4,000 British Army Territorials! They were informed that this was not possible except by way of a Royal Proclamation and only for service with Nato forces in a European war!

British ballistic experts and weapon technicians are alleged to be devising a new 'Ulster-gun' for use in built-up areas and acquiring 'more powerful' rubber bullets. The British Army operates under the hated Special Powers Act (first passed in Northern Ireland in 1922 and made permanent in 1933) and publicly pronounce that they are acting under 'common law'. They have left the people here with little respect for British common law! A local newspaper posed the question: 'Can August be worse than July?' All signs are that it will. At the time of writing, the day approaches for the Apprentice Boys' parade in Derry on August 12; Faulkner, the Army GOC (responsible for 'law and order'), and Maudling, the British Home Secretary, have refused to act to preserve the peace by forbidding it to take place. Yet Derry is a 'danger point' and especially so since the killing, by the British Army, of two young unarmed men in June during a minor riot.

For this parade, and those of the Royal Black Preceptory (Masonic

Order) on August 31, the British Army is on duty to see that they are not interfered with, and the British Government is in complete agreement. This was made abundantly clear in a reply to Mr Gerry Fitt in the British House when he asked how many British soldiers were members of the Orange Order. Mr Geoffrey Johnston Smith, at the Ministry of Defence, replied: 'I cannot say. This is a matter for the individual serviceman'! And so we have the contrast: thousands of British troops geared to ensure that sectarian demonstrations take place and thousands more to keep the Catholic populace confined in their ghettos whilst the parading goes on and, if necessary, invade those homes and administer 'British justice'. No wonder the Editor of the *Irish Times* (August 4, 1971) commented: 'It is a strange occupation for soldiers—to be backing up a sectarian rite in the divided city of Derry.' Mr Eddie McAteer, president of the Nationalist Party and who represented a Derry constituency at Stormont for twenty-five years, was forced to comment after raids by the military there in the early hours of August 4 (the 57th anniversary of the declaration of the first world war): 'The British Army is driving the whole population into the arms of the IRA.'

The Communist Party has said that the situation is fraught with grave dangers but also with great possibilities. It has welcomed the decision of the opposition MPs for two reasons. Firstly, it totally exposes and leaves bare the parliamentary facade created by Britain and which, in the hands of the Unionists, was destined to prevent any other party, or group of parties, coming to power. Secondly, the possibility now arises of bringing the people of Northern Ireland along the road proposed by the Party's programme (1962) of a progressive government at Stormont. A call has been made for the widest possible alliance of all the forces opposed to Unionism to ensure the success of an alternative Assembly; for a united leadership and a common programme based on democratic methods of voting and elections; a return to civil rule and civil law; no internment and an end to military rule; a vast programme of public works to overcome the terrible unemployment and provide homes, schools, etc.; and which would create the basis for a political struggle to end British political and military interference in Ireland.

The action of withdrawal from Stormont, the massive dawn searches carried out by the military forces in the homes of those opposed to Unionism, the threat of internment of political opponents, the demands of the Unionist right wing for more repressive measures and the failure to curb these demands, the use of the British armed forces to protect sectarian parades even in 'flash point' areas and the

failure of the Government to carry out the reforms have all combined to unite the forces of anti-Unionism in a way not experienced since the early days of the civil rights campaign. The people are fighting back with ever greater vigour, and they are learning that unity is strength. They want a political solution to a problem created by Britain in 1920, when British Tories and Liberals fathered the Northern Ireland puppet state. Mr Maudling may believe that he is conducting 'open war' against the IRA. If so, he is as badly advised as were the Ministers dealing with the affairs of Rolls-Royce. He will learn that the Northern Ireland problem cannot be wished away. They cannot be dealt with by way of a cash subsidy. The US Senate will not come to his aid. Nor will the 11,000 troops, paid for by the British taxpayer, solve the situation. As in Vietnam, there will be no military victory. Only a political solution will answer the needs of the vast majority of the one-and-a-half million people whose only wish is to live in peace and amity with the rest of the Irish people and with the people of Britain.

At the time of going to press, the following letter from Betty Sinclair has reached us from Belfast, written on August 15:

Arising from the highly dangerous and dubious agreement made between the British Government and Brian Faulkner, Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, at the meeting held in London on August 5, an agreement was made to ban all marches for six months. This included the August 12 march of the Apprentice Boys which was defended by London. As a *quid pro quo*, Faulkner pushed for internment. It was necessary if he was to be saved—it was his 'last throw'—from his right wing.

At least four senior ministers in his Cabinet, along with two Junior Ministers, had made it clear, one very publicly, that they could not continue 'to serve' unless internment was brought in. The leaders of the Orange Order, the Royal Black Preceptory, the Apprentice Boys and similar 'loyalist' organisations have now stated (after the introduction of internment) that they 'fully support'

the security forces, i.e. the British Army, and have given Faulkner 'two months' to get the situation 'back to normal'.

The ugly situation now, six days after 'Bloody Monday' (August 9), when internment was put into force by the British Army under the *Special Powers Act*, is that over 1,000 political prisoners are held (mostly anti-Unionist); at least 230 internees have been taken in (all anti-Unionist and mostly men who were political, as opposed to 'physical force', opponents of Unionism); and searches of homes, only in Catholic areas, are carried out continually. Most of the latter areas are patrolled, night and day, by the military forces who are fully armed.

The internment was also a signal for a further pogrom which was sparked off by the ultras in the Unionist fold. Some 300 Protestant and Catholic homes have been burnt down in 'mixed' Catholic and Protestant areas by bands of such people displacing about 2,000 Protestants, most of whom have remained in the

city. These thugs (and the brutal searches by the military for men to intern) also practised sniping into the Catholic areas and created panic among women and children. Over 8,000 Catholic women and children have sought refuge in the Irish Republic. The numbers who have gone to live with relatives within Belfast and in Britain is not known.

This latest pogrom has been greater in intensity than any which has gone before. The August 1969 pogrom was, rightly, blamed on the Northern Ireland Government and its security forces, i.e. the armed RUC and 'B' Specials. The August 1971 pogrom, the blame for it, has been laid at the door of the Westminster Government and its security forces, i.e. the British army. The latter are operating under the Special Powers Act and in co-operation with a *rearmed* RUC.

Both the Stormont and Westminster Governments refuse to recognise that there exists, or to take action against, an armed right wing of the Unionist Party. Yet, at July 31, 1971, there were 99,048 licenced firearms in Northern Ireland, and which included 69,000 shot guns, 7,000 high-powered rifles and 4,500 pistols. (The figure of illegally held weapons, in such hands, is impossible to estimate or ascertain.) All around the countryside, former 'B' Specials have been permitted to form 'Gun Clubs'. The RUC has been

rearmed. All the members of the Ulster Defence Regiment have been put on full-time duty. The police reserve is fully-operational. The British armed forces strength is given variously as between 12,000 and 18,000. (The latter figure was given by the ultra-Unionist newspaper, the *Belfast News Letter*.) Now (August 15) the GOC General Tuzo has given a 'stern warning' that all weapons used, or suspected of being or about to be used, against the British Army, will be considered 'lethal' and persons in such situations are 'likely to be shot'.

Further, Tuzo has stated that they will no longer 'permit' the existence of 'no-go areas' (this is a further demand of the ultra-Unionists)—areas where the people have endeavoured to keep out the 'security forces' in order to protect their homes.

It is clear that the military repression will increase—the day might not be far off when curfews and open martial law will be declared—and it will necessitate the greatest support, for the people here, from the British trade union and labour movement. We are glad to see that more than 100 Labour MPs are demanding the recall of the Westminster Parliament. But more must be done if further British and Irish lives are not to be lost.

BETTY SINCLAIR

In Memory of Joan Beauchamp (1890-1964)

The Trinity Trust has received a donation of £250 from Mr Brian Thompson, drawn from the estate of his mother, Joan Beauchamp (Mrs Joan Thompson), and fulfilling what he believes would have been her wish. During the early years of *Labour Monthly* Joan gave it invaluable service, particularly in managing its business affairs, and was also Secretary of the Trinity Trust. Among her many distinguished services, both by voice and pen, she continued her close interest in this journal; and after the second world war (when she was the victim of a Nazi bomb) she still gave help to the journal to the extent that her precarious health permitted.