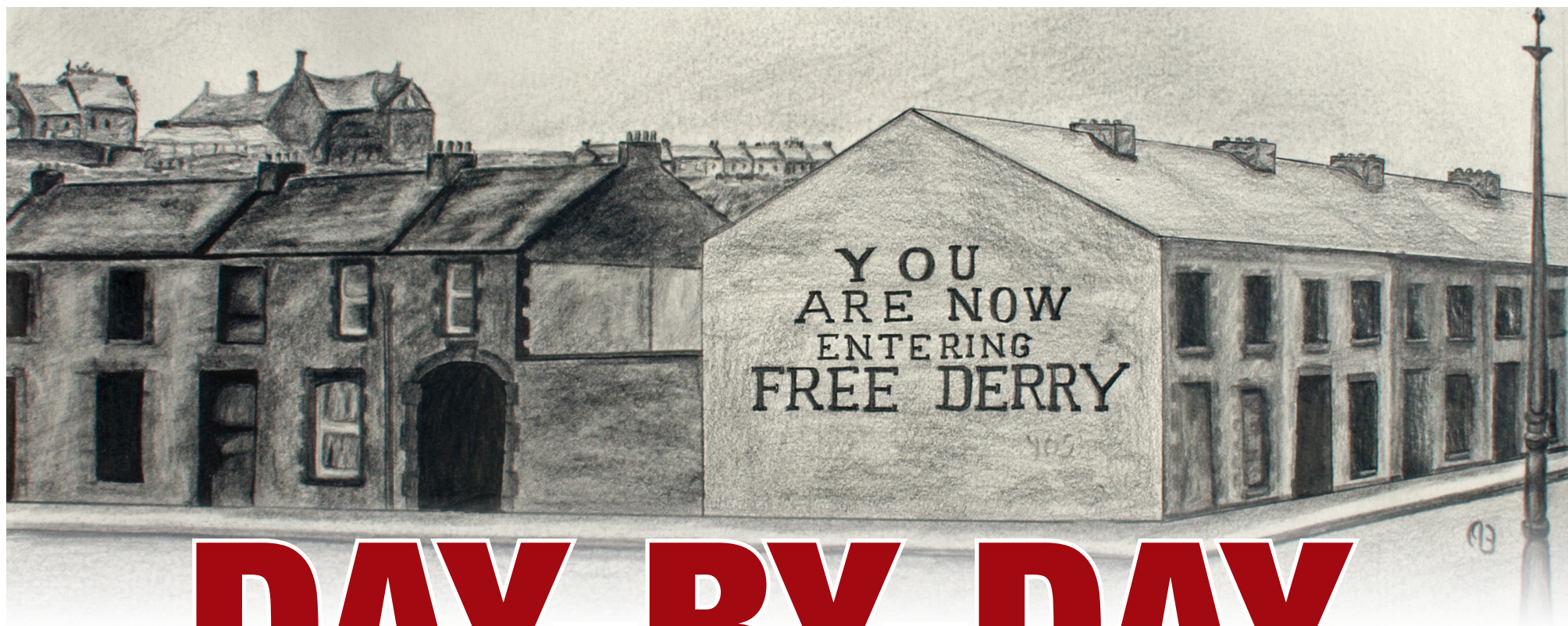


Workers' Liberty

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DAY-BY-DAY, HOW THE STATE BROKE DOWN IN NORTHERN IRELAND, 1969

Politically, Northern Ireland in 1968-9 was sterile territory. Nothing had been done by political parties or groups to explore a possible democratic modus vivendi between Catholic Nationalists – with their ultimate aim of a united Ireland – and Protestant-Unionists, who were determined to remain united with Britain, or at any rate, determined not to become a powerless Protestant minority in a Catholic-majority all-Ireland state. They confronted each other as irreconcilable enemies.

In Catholic “Derry of the burning zeal” (as Thomas Kinsella called it) there was, by the summer of 1969, a heroic spirit of determined revolt. It was by no means only the youth. The Catholics of all ages were unwilling to go on as for the previous decades. Without the taint of hyperbole, one might even speak of “The Commune of Derry” that rose repeatedly – three times in 1969 – behind improvised barricades. But only of Catholic Derry. And they could make neither a nationalist or a socialist revolution. At the best, they could win only reforms within the 6 Counties

They were encouraged in their revolt by the sympathy and outrage on their behalf in the media and in the British Labour government, which openly demanded reform. In August, they were spurred on by fear of more sectarian onslaughts by the RUC, the B-Specials, and the Paisleyites.

Essentially, they were trying to break the framework of the 6 Counties entity and the limitations it imposed on their struggle. In January and April 1969, Catholic barricades had gone up against the Six Counties state. An editorial (by John Palmer) in *Socialist Worker* (on 21 August 1969, when Catholic Derry and parts of Belfast were barricaded off) accurately depicted what they were groping towards.

“In Derry in particular the Bogside has a real chance of holding out. The Derry people, who are overwhelmingly anti-Unionist, were never consulted about the Border. They were forcibly co-opted into the Northern State.... One day the people of Derry will take their city from the Chichester-Clarks and the slum landlords.”

The Catholics of Derry, who would not take down the barricades of August until October, were, evidently, groping towards breaking away from the “Protestant State”.

The 6/26 County partition of Ireland was a curse on the Protestants within it as well as to the Catholics.

Many elements entered into the social and political discrimination of which the Catholics were the victims, very importantly a general scarcity of jobs and of material resources; ages of Catholic/ Protestant animosity; and the inbred belief among the Protestants that the Catholic Irish were an inferior people. The Protestants themselves were the people who mattered – “we the people!”

The things that kept the Protestant

belief alive, that united Protestant-Unionists to defend and sustain it, were not only political differences and the competition for scarce resources, but also fear. The Protestant-Unionists were a minority on the island. It had taken an armed near-revolt, and the credible threat of a real revolt, on the eve of the First World War, to keep them from being delivered by Britain to their age-old enemies as a minority in a Home Rule Ireland.

The way the 26 Counties had developed into the “Rome Rule” which Protestants had said Home Rule would inevitably be, suggested to them that their fears and their efforts to avoid being a Protestant-British minority in a Catholic-ruled “Irish Ireland” had after all, not been needless fears.

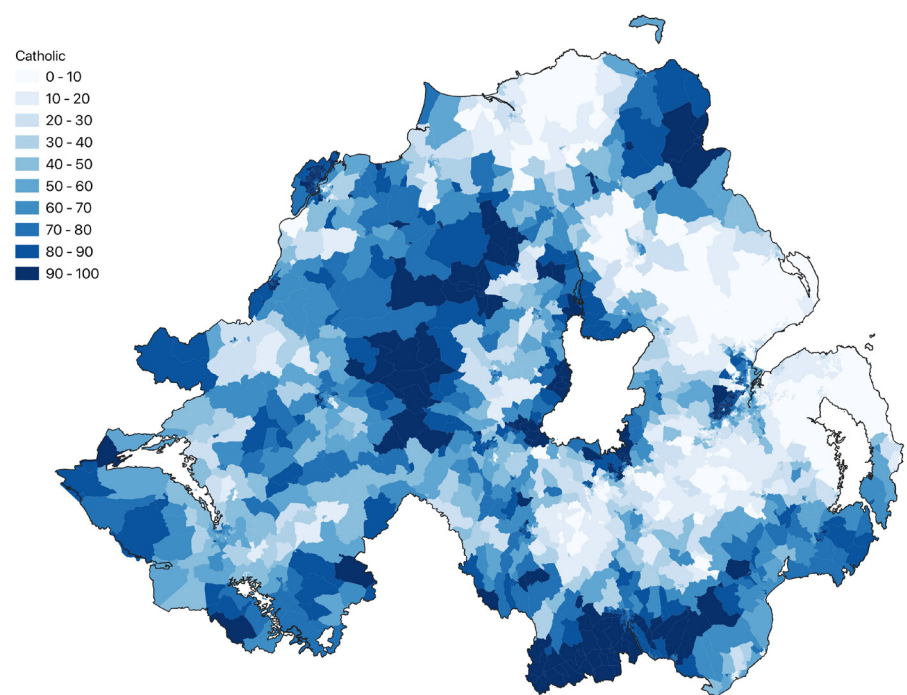
In 1969, they feared “betrayal” by London, and were on the look-out for it. They saw the pressure for reform from London as the thin end of the wedge whose thick end would be an attempt to force them into a united Ireland. They saw the Catholic mobilisations for civil rights as Republicanism writ small, but small only for the moment.

A writer in the Dublin paper, *The Irish Press*, reporting on the events of mid-August 1969 in Derry, described how fear-ridden Orange reaction helped push Partition to the political forefront within a few months of the launching of the Civil Rights movement, despite the efforts made to exclude it from the movement

“It has proved impossible to exclude violence and the Partition issue from the civil rights campaign not because, as Major Chichester Clark alleges, Republicans and hooligans subverted the movement, but because the Paisleyite element, seeing the threat to Unionist dominance in the civil rights movement’s legitimate demands, did everything in their power to pervert the campaign into a naked confrontation of violence and hate. Unfortunately they succeeded”.

And they were not entirely wrong in their fears, though their own backlash speeded up and intensified what they feared. The basic “civil right” the Catholics lacked was national self-determination. And the Catholics were in the majority in large swathes of the state’s border territory; for a large part of them, it was not a case of being a minority inescapably interlaced with a majority population. The Six Counties Catholics outside of Belfast were by and large an artificially created minority, a section of the majority population in the island artificially severed by the border drawn for the “Protestant state”.

The logic of the demand for civil rights formulated by the civil rights movement – and not too many links along the chain of social-political development, either – was a demand for the abolition of the Six Counties state. There were people at the heart of the civil rights movement – the Republicans – whose ultimate goal was Irish unity, and who saw the civil rights movements and its mobilisations as a



Northern Ireland: Catholic percentages of population. This is 2021, but 1969 also had Catholic majorities in much of the land area

first stage in the overthrow of the Six Counties state. (Desmond Greaves of the Communist Party’s Irish front in Britain, for example, the political guru of those who led the IRA up to the Provisional IRA split in December 1969, saw it that way. See the memoir of Greaves by one of them, Anthony Coughlan).

The candid Catholic-nationalist answer to those Protestant fears was: why shouldn’t we? What right have you to expect anything else?

It was a tragic communal-national-religious antagonism, build in to the Six Counties, and given a special intensity and intractability by the artificiality of the state. That Northern Ireland should begin to break apart “vertically” on 12 August 1969 in Derry was in the very nature of the Six Counties. It was by August 1969 what we would now call a “failed state”.

What follows is a stark outline of the breakdown of the old order in Northern Ireland and the beginning of low-level Protestant-Unionist vs Catholic nationalist civil war.

August 1969

Before the general breakdown of “law and order” between 12 and 15 August 1969, parts of Northern Ireland are already on fire. Serious clashes between police and Catholic youth have erupted in Derry on 12 July.

Not only Catholic Northern Ireland is inflamed. Protestant Belfast, especially the Shankill Road district, the heart of Protestant working-class Belfast, is disaffected too. The Protestant Shankill Road and the Catholic Falls Road run parallel to each other, separated only by a network of small streets.

Weekend of 2-3 August 1969

Shankill Road Protestants riot, fight police, and loot “Protestant” shops. The clashes start when police try to disperse a crowd which has gathered around the (“Catholic”) Unity Walk flats, near the beginning of the Shankill Road.

Petrol bombs are thrown at the RUC. A seven-hour battle is fought on the Shankill Road. Water cannon and

riot trucks are used. There are baton charges. The police, helmeted, with riot shields and long truncheons, baton-charge the Protestant crowd.

There is extensive looting of “Protestant” shops, from grocers to furniture sellers. Kids hand out loot through the broken windows. Some shops are set on fire. It was very like what the working class of the Dublin slums had done during the insurrection there in 1916.

Both Ian Paisley and his chief lieutenant, Major Ronald Bunting, are jeered at and booed when they appeal to the Protestant crowd to go home.

The mile-long Shankill Road is a battle zone, strewn with bricks and bottles. Cars are used as a barricade, and set on fire; the RUC use armoured cars to break the barricade. A petrol bomb sets an RUC man on fire.

Over 20 RUC are injured, two seriously. There is talk of a curfew, but that would require either troops or extra police from Britain to enforce it, so it is not attempted.

The RUC reserve force, the B-Specials, the all-Protestant militia, is mobilised on the Shankill to prevent further



People’s Democracy opposed British troops after first calling for them to be sent in
Pic: cain.ulster.ac.uk

looting. Troops have been brought in to back up the cops if necessary, but they are held in reserve. They play no role yet. It is up to the Northern Ireland Government and the RUC chiefs to decide if they will be deployed or not.

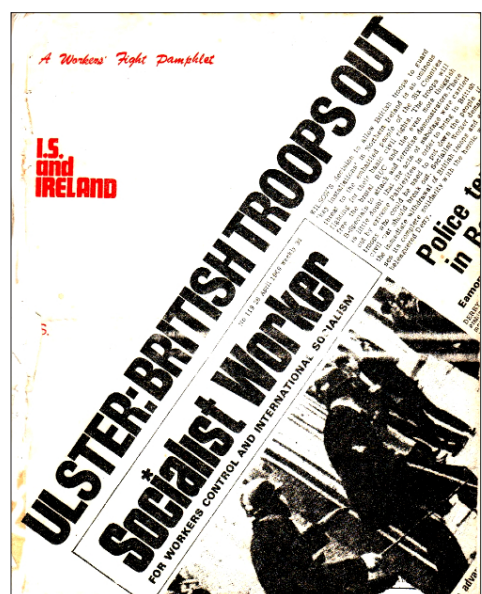
Why does the Stormont government not ask for troops, which in the past have been used for riot control? Because the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson has said publicly that if it comes to the point that the Belfast Government at Stormont needs troops to maintain law and order, then the whole constitutional relationship between Britain and Northern Ireland will have to be re-examined. It does and it will. The political cost is likely to prove too high to Unionism for the Belfast regime to call for troops while it still thinks it has other options. They will be a last resort.

Monday 4 August

Labour Home Secretary James Callaghan sees "law and order" as the Belfast government's responsibility.

Rival Catholic and Protestant mobs clash. Both sides petrol-bomb the RUC. The RUC says it blames "Trotsky-anarchists" for the trouble.

In response to the clashes between the Protestants and the police, Bernadette Devlin (who has been elected in April as Westminster MP for Mid-Ulster, and in London has functioned as a sort of "IS MP", IS being the forerunner of the SWP), speaking at a PD meeting in Enniskillen, appeals to the Protestant workers who have been fighting the police to back the civil rights movement. Devlin notes the statement by the Protestant Shankill Defence Association that the "police are no longer the friends of Ulster Loyalists and never can expect our help again". She appeals to them: now that the Government has shown its readiness to use police – "the armed wing of the Unionist party"



Our critique of and counterproposals to Socialist Worker's support for British troop deployment in Northern Ireland in 1969: read online at bit.ly/is-ire. The SW headline shown on the cover was from April 1969, and we had criticised it as simplistic and nationalistic. Then SW u-turned in August 1969. "IS" was the name then of SWP.

– against Protestants as well as Catholics, Protestant workers should unite with their Catholic brothers and sisters against the Unionist government.

But Devlin simply doesn't know where she is. The Shankill Defence Association is led by the ultra-Paisleyite, and obvious lunatic, John McKeague. The naivety here is mind-boggling. With so small a purchase on reality, the socialism and appeals to working-class unity Devlin represents are flimsy, fanciful, even idiosyncratic, things.

Perhaps Devlin knows that, for she also appeals to British Home Secretary James Callaghan to put the RUC under the control of British police officers. She says she wants the recall of the Westminster Parliament to discuss the situation in Northern Ireland. Through the crisis that is now about to break, this most prominent of Northern Ireland, even of UK, revolutionary socialists will combine other such "practical" proposals with inconsequential talk of working class unity and socialism.

Tuesday 5 August

Paisleyites storm the Council Chamber in Lisburn, County Antrim – Protestant-Unionist territory. The newspapers print pictures of riot-gear-clad police and streets showing blackened patches from petrol bombs and littered with glass, bottles and broken paving stones.

Wednesday 6 August

"Intimidation" of Catholics living among Protestants and vice versa is already rampant in Belfast. The "Catholic" Ardoynce Tenants' Association says that it knows of 60 Catholic families forced out.

"Everyone" knows and fears what is likely to come out of the Orange parade in Derry on 12 August. But nobody has the will to do anything to avert it.

The *Belfast Newsletter* reports that in a poll it has had taken 90% want a ban on all parades. Parades will indeed be banned – on 13 August, when the Orange march in Derry has already set fire to the 6 Counties.

Sunday 10 August

Prayers for peace are offered up in chapels and prayer-houses all over Northern Ireland. Though nobody expects the scale and intensity of what will happen, everyone expects a catastrophic eruption of communalism from the Apprentice Boys march in Derry on the 12th, when 15,000 Protestants in full Orange regalia are expected to parade there.

In anticipation of 12 August, a meeting is held in Celtic Park, Derry, where John Hume MP, Eamonn McCann and seven others speak to a crowd of about a thousand people.

The revolutionary socialist McCann is self-conscious about advocating "peace". He tells the meeting that the reason to oppose violence is that it will be the wrong sort of violence directed at the wrong targets, at Catholics by Protestants and at Protestants by Catholics. But this is no more than a pri-

vate argument inside Eamonn McCann. It is beside the point.

He is self-conscious also about the political company he has been keeping. He pledges that if they get past Tuesday's Apprentice Boys' August Parade in something resembling peace he, McCann, will "never again be associated with a united Catholic platform" embodying cross-class Catholic unity at a meeting like this. In its own way, this is a sort of prayer – McCann's contribution to the ocean of prayers that is that day being poured out all over Northern Ireland: the supplicant promises God to do good in future if only God will grant something fervently wished for now: Catholic-Protestant peace on the 12th! (God won't listen, and Eamonn won't keep his promise.)

Neil Gillespie, an old quavery-voiced, much-respected Republican veteran of the Irish War of Independence, is an honoured speaker. He says: "If we are forced to fight, then let us in God's name fight as peace-loving men". Gillespie will be wheeled out by the future SDLPers at the DCDA meeting of October 10 to help persuade the meeting to agree to dismantle the last barricade, let the RUC and the British army in and liquidate "Free Derry". Two months after that he will be the titular Secretary in Derry of the breakaway Provisional Republican movement...

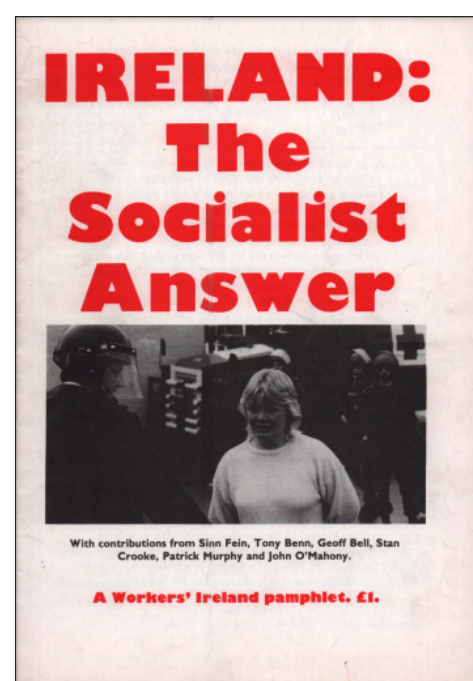
Eddie McAteer, leader of the Nationalist Party, recently defeated in the February Northern Ireland General Election for a Derry seat by fellow platform speaker, John Hume, expects a catastrophe on the 12th. "Tuesday may", he thinks, "raise the curtain on the last terrible act of the age-long Irish drama". He appeals directly to the Dublin Government: "Help us" if Derry erupts. If and when it does, he hopes that "our watching brethren in the South would no longer stand aside".

The Bogsiders express the wish for peace; but they prepare for war to defend themselves. A couple of weeks earlier, a Derry Citizens Defence Association (DCDA) has been set up on the initiative of the long-time Republican ex-internee Sean Keenan. They have made plans and piled up weapons, stones and the makings for petrol bombs – to defend themselves against the Northern Ireland State's armour-clad police, wielding truncheons, tear gas and guns, and deploying armoured cars.

Monday 11 August

Most of the social, moral, and religious authorities in Northern Ireland reiterate their desire for peace. Expecting war, they act as if talk alone can avert it. Dr Abernethy, Governor of the Apprentice Boys, who plan to march the next day in Derry, says that he wants peace. John Hume, the independent Catholic MP for Foyle, wants peace. He says that the Apprentice Boys have a right to march, but it would be unwise for them to exercise that right.

But Northern Ireland is now in the grip of a mechanism more powerful



1989 pamphlet making the case for socialist workers' unity with a democratic programme of a federal united Ireland: read online at bit.ly/ire-sa

than pious hopes.

Appeals are again made by Stormont opposition MPs and Westminster Labour MPs for the Northern Ireland government to ban the march. But the government knows that a ban will be defied. An attempt to enforce a ban would lead the Government into bitter conflict with its own Unionist supporters. London, which has overall responsibility for Northern Ireland, accepts the decision of the Unionist government.

Northern Ireland moves like a sleepwalker towards the general breakdown of 12-15 August.

All the responsible authorities fatalistically hope for the best. Nothing is done to avert the catastrophe. Reading the newspapers of the time, knowing what will follow, is like watching in slow motion an imminent crash, the vehicles hurtling towards each other murderously, as if no-one is inside them taking control.

Tuesday 12 August

The Apprentice Boys march begins, if not quietly, peacefully; and it remains more or less peaceful for a while. Trouble starts at 3pm. Catholic youths gathered behind police barricades in William Street, at the entrance to the Bogside, which pens them in, jeer, swear and make rude gestures at the marchers and the stationary lines of riot-clad police separating them from the marchers. They begin to throw stones and bottles at them. From the walls, Protestants shout back abuse at the Catholics: "Fenian bastards", and worse. Stones and bottles are thrown back.

After this has been going on for some time, 200 police and a very large crowd of Loyalist youth, led by an armoured car and police jeeps, chase the youths back to their own territory and then attempt, following them in, to invade the Bogside. The police are still accompanied by Protestant youths; and they make no attempt to discourage them

or distinguish themselves from them. They are all beaten back; but again they attack; and again...

The battle that will rage for two days and ignite Northern Ireland has begun.

The Derry Citizens Defence Association has prepared well. Barricades are quickly thrown up around the Bogside, and then reinforced and strengthened. In the rear of the front line barricade, petrol bombs on a large scale are prepared for use. A continuous stream of petrol bombs and stones is brought to the barricade fighters. Pavements are dug up and broken into throw-size pieces. Showers of stones and bottles of petrol – with flaming petrol-soaked rags plugging the neck of the bottles to dam off the petrol and soap suds inside, until the glass shatters and the flame and the released petrol unite in an explosive conflagration, the petrol spreading on the soapy water – rain down on the armoured and shield-carrying police and their helpers, like flights of arrows on a medieval army.

It is no longer just a section of the Bogside youth. The youth, and the police and Paisleyites, have detonated the whole population of the Bogside. People of all ages and persuasions turn out, determined this time to prevent the police and their civilian helpers ranging through the Bogside, truncheoning and beating indiscriminately.

One newspaper quotes a young Catholic fighter, shop worker Maureen Roche. "They've had this coming for a long time. We've had to put up with their bullying for years". Another youth agrees: "They've believed that they can beat us up whenever they want to, but that day is gone".

The Bogside dig trenches in the street to stop police water-cannon wagons. They burn mattresses and furniture from their own homes. Police begin to use CS gas. Soon the Bogside will be swamped in CS gas.

A valuable eyewitness report by Joe Carroll in the Dublin *Irish Press* (the nationalist paper of the governing Fianna Fail Party) of 18 August, describes how the fighting started, "despite the efforts of civil rights leaders like Hume and McAteer". After the first stones landed on the Apprentice Boys, "riot police with helmets and shields and clutching batons massed in several lines, confronting the Bogside youths across steel barriers.

"From 4.15 to 5.05 the police were showered from close range with every type of missile, which they tried to ward off with their shields, but they made no attempt to throw back.

"Most of those who witnessed the scene must have felt rather sickened by the sight of cursing youngsters firing literally lethal weapons at exposed policemen who, it must be emphasised, at this stage made no attempt to enter the Bogside proper...

"This was a crucial episode because along with myself it was witnessed by thousands of Protestants, both marchers and spectators, with what mounting fury can be imagined. The stoning was



The map uses the name for Derry historically preferred by Unionists, "Londonderry"

also carried out in defiance of commands and appeals by civil rights stewards and the leaders mentioned earlier [Hume and McAteer].

"The sequel was inevitable – a police charge and the scattering of the youths – but the escalation of the violence which also ensued was certainly avoidable, and could fairly be said to have precipitated the rest of the week's tragic events.

"Having driven the Bogside youths back up William St, leading to the Bogside proper, the police made a deliberate decision to make a lightning charge down Rossville Street past the eight-storey flats which command the entry into the Lecky Road, which could be described as a spur of the Bogside.

"Worst of all, the police made no effort to deter or even discourage a pack of Protestant extremists who followed on their heels, stoning Catholic flats and such people as came within range.

"The police immediately retreated then to the fringe of the Bogside, but in those few minutes the pivotal event of the rest of the week's pattern of violence had taken place. The police had 'invaded' the Bogside and had tacitly permitted Protestant thugs to form part of the invasion". Police had raided the Falls Road in April and beaten one of the residents, Samuel Devenny, to death.

"The news was a clarion call to the whole of the Bogside, and the handful of youths who had defied their stewards' appeals were now joined by practically every man, woman, and child in

the Bogside, in building and maintaining defensive barricades and ensuring an enormous supply of petrol bombs..."

But Derry City is neither a geographical not a political island. Soon, the fighting begins to spread outside Derry. Catholics are spurred by the impulse to help Derry into taking to their own streets. In the next 36 hours the sparks from Derry will ignite Catholic demonstrations all over Northern Ireland. At Strabane, 14 miles from Derry, the RUC station is besieged. In Dungannon on the night of the 12th, clashes leave 30 injured.

Counting 5 October 1968 and its immediate aftermath in Derry, this is the fifth war between Bogside and the RUC in 10 months, and it is the worst.

This round of RUC-Catholic fighting in Derry is in scale and in the involvement of Protestant-Unionist civilians in partnership with the RUC, the start of a general Catholic-Protestant communal war. Like spreading fire, it had begun to catch outside Derry. The need to stop it developing further might persuade a half-way responsible government, even if it had not dared, or desired, to ban the march on 12 August, to pull the RUC back from the confrontation. The Government can at will stop the fighting in Derry simply by calling off the RUC and leaving the Bogside in possession of the Bogside. It will not choose to do that. The Government, like the police, is determined to subdue the Bogside and overrun it.

As the catastrophe which Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer had

predicted two days earlier, seems inexorably to be engulfing the peoples of Northern Ireland, late on August 12, Bernadette Devlin MP and Eamonn McCann issue a joint statement appealing for outside help, as had Eddie McAteer two days earlier. Where McAteer had in advance appealed to the Government of the 26 Counties to send troops to intervene, McCann and Devlin – certainly with more realism – direct their appeal to London.

"The riot which has taken place in Derry today, and resulting violence in other areas of Northern Ireland, show that Northern Ireland is ungovernable under the present constitution. Westminster must now act.

"The barricades in the Bogside in Derry must not be taken down until the Westminster government states its clear commitment to the suspension of the constitution of Northern Ireland and calls immediately a constitutional conference representative of Westminster, the Unionist government, the Government of the Republic of Ireland, and all tendencies within the civil rights movement.

"The situation in Derry at the moment is such that the people of Bogside are fighting off the combined forces of the police and the Paisleyites, who are operating as a single unit. The police have already entered Bogside with the support of the Paisleyites in defiance of orders from senior officers. Therefore the RUC is out of control and can no longer be considered as the force of law and order. The country is now in a state of

chaos.

"It is the responsibility of Harold Wilson and his government, who should have acted almost a year ago and who have repeatedly been warned by ourselves and others of the possible consequences of their deliberate and total inaction. It may well be of personal concern to Harold Wilson that, given his own position in the Labour Party, he cannot take the political risk of intervening in Northern Ireland. We consider the lives of Irish people more important than the career of Harold Wilson". (*Irish Press*, 13.08.69).

THE EASTER RISING AND IRISH HISTORY



An attempt at a Marxist account.
£4 (inc. post): bit.ly/shop-wl

Wednesday 13 August

While London waits upon a call to inter-vene from the RUC and the Stormont Government, the 26 County govern-ment decides to "intervene", not as McAteer and others want it to, by send-ing troops, but in a way that can not but stoke up the fire on both sides of the communal divide. Taoiseach Jack Lynch appears on TV to make an emotional declaration on what is happening in the Six Counties. He warns that his government could not continue to "stand idly by".

"It is clear now that the present situation cannot be allowed to continue... It is evident... that the Stormont government is no longer in control of the situa-tion. Indeed the present situation is the inevitable outcome of the policies pur-sued by successive Stormont govern-ments... The Irish government can no longer stand idly by and see innocent people injured or worse... It is obvious that the RUC is no longer acceptable as an impartial police force. Neither would the employment of British troops be

acceptable, nor would they be likely to restore peaceful conditions – certainly not in the long term".

The Dublin Government is, he says, appealing to the UN to act. He has "requested" the British government to seek UN help, or else agree to a joint "Anglo-Eire" peace-keeping military force in Northern Ireland.

All that Lynch says is true and some of it prescient. And? What is Lynch going to do about it? What can he do? If the Irish army moves into Derry, then Protestants, and – unless there is some pre-agreed Dublin-London plan to divide up the 6 Counties – the British army will resist. And yet, if there was ever a case to be made for the 26 County army moving into Derry and the other Catholic-Nationalist majority areas bordering on the republic, Lynch has made it, But Lynch confines himself to an empty threat and a little bit of pseudo-nationalist pseudo-militant political theatre. It is fake-Republican "gesture politics".

He does not "mean business" even about calling in the UN. As Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association Chairman Frank Gogarty comments: the only possibility of UN involvement is if the Irish army does cross the border, creating an "international incident".

But Lynch's speech encourages Catholic all over Northern Ireland to act, naturally, and must give some of them the expectation that they will soon be rescued from their captivity in the Protestant state. It gives Protestants the same idea. Uncoupled as it is from commensurate action, it is, to say the least, irresponsible.

Jack Lynch's own Fianna Fail paper, the *Irish Press*, comments: "Virtual civil war hit Derry in the wake of the Taoiseach's speech when 500 cheering men, women and children, hurling petrol bombs and stones, waving the tricolour and shouting 'Up The Republic', charged RUC and B-Specials..... But their place was taken by a strong group of Paisleyites, who hurled petrol bombs and stones at the jubilant Bogside".

If Lynch's speech raising the spectre of imminent invasion before the eyes of the Northern Ireland Protestants, a statement by Cathal Goulding, Stalinist chief of staff of a very shadowy IRA tells them that the invasion is already under way. Goulding announces that a number of fully-armed IRA units are already active in Northern Ireland. They aren't: it is all bluff and bluster by IRA leaders who have been wrong-footed by events. Local Republicans like Sean Keenan, John White and Finbar O'Doherty are indeed involved, centrally, in the defence of the Bogside and others soon will be in Belfast.

It is all extra kindling on the fire. It helps strengthen the interpretation that Northern Ireland is in the grip of a coordinated nationalist rising.

Sinn Fein seconds Lynch in calling for UN intervention. Sinn Fein President Tomas MacGiolla sends a telegram to UN Secretary General U Thant calling for UN troops to be sent to the Six Counties.



People's Democracy poster on N Ireland Prime Minister Major James Chichester Clark

In the South there is growing outrage. Large demonstrations are mounted outside the British Embassy in Dublin. In Donegal, the "Southern" county a couple of miles from Derry City, Letterkenny Urban Council passes a resolution calling for the Irish Army to invade Northern Ireland. The Council calls on Lynch "to move troops into Northern Ireland to bring back peace and look after our persecuted brethern, those who are being persecuted by a sectarian armed force known as the B-Specials."

Southerners cross into the border town of Newry and join local Catholics against the RUC. There are calls for volunteers for the north from Republicans, and even from the Irish equivalent of the Stalinist Young Communist League, the Connolly Youth Movement (which in general believes that the socialist revolution will be made peacefully, through existing parliaments).

The story begins to spread in Dublin that the Irish cabinet is divided, that Lynch's angry speech is a compromise – that at least three Dublin ministers want the Irish army to move into Derry city and the other Catholic majority areas, urban and rural, along the border. The three include the future Taoiseach Charles Haughey, himself one whose parents had fled south in the early 20s. Early the following year Dublin Ministers will be dismissed from Government and prosecuted for running guns to the North (they will be acquitted).

Officers of the Irish Army in civilian clothes are sent to liaise with the Defence Committees and the fighters in Derry, Belfast, and other areas, and to help coordinate them..

For a short while, the 26 Counties state, whose 1937 constitution lays claim to the Six Counties territory, as part of the Independent Irish state, seems on the verge of getting drawn into civil war and – probably – war with Britain.

From mid-August, even after Lynch

has issued a joint statement with Britain guaranteeing the territorial integrity of the 6 County entity so long as a majority there want that, arms training will, on the quiet, be provided at the army camp over the border in Donegal for selected men from Derry.

Instead of retreating from the siege of the Bogside, Northern Ireland Prime Minister Clark now escalates the conflict. While the fighting is still raging in Derry, he tells the Stormont MPs – and the whole Unionist population – that they face a general Catholic insurrection to force the Protestants into a Catholic-majority Irish state. He implies that the insurrection is controlled by a conspiracy. Bitterly he denounces “Eire’s clumsy intrusion” into Northern Ireland’s internal affairs – Lynch’s speech. On radio and TV, the Belfast government sends out a call to the 8,500-strong armed Protestant militia, the B-Specials to mobilise. (There are 3,000 RUC.) It is taken as a public declaration of full-scale war on Derry and the other areas where Catholics have been stirring.

And in effect it is a call for more than the B-Specials to rally to the defence of Protestant Ulster. It is a call to all Protestants, to the sort of people who are already going to Derry to “do their bit” against the rebellious taigs. In fact though, the B-Specials will play only a very limited role. In calling them out, inadvertently, Clark is digging old-style Unionism deeper into the pit.

Eight opposition members – John Hume and others – boycott the Stormont debate on the situation in Northern Ireland, where Clark raises the alarm against the Catholic insurrection.

Protestants are streaming into Derry in cars and motor cycles, armed with pick-axe handles, helmets, and some guns, to help the cops put down the Fenian uprising. There is now some gunfire.

The British Government still stands “idly by”. So far it is the Left of the civil rights movement – Devlin and McCann – and not only the left, that is calling on the British Government to take control

of Northern Ireland.

The left is in the forefront of the fight in Derry. The London *Times* quotes Bernadette Devlin telling a crowd: “I want you to fill your pockets with stones and carry a petrol bomb in each hand. Then we will rush the barricades”. She urges them to fight “the black bastards”, the RUC. “Black” Protestants, the “Black North”, are Catholic-religious terms. Devlin is the Catholic-nationalist “unity” MP for Mid-Ulster, a constituency where if Catholics are united, as in the April 1969 election they were, they can win the seat.

To criticisms that an MP should not do such things, she sends a message: “Tell them that I did not go to Westminster to join their bloody club”.

Wednesday August 13, outside Derry

More and more Catholics across Northern Ireland are starting to act to take the pressure off Derry. At least eight police stations are attacked: in Belfast, Dungannon, Armagh, Coalisland, Dungiven, Dungannon, Enniskillen, and Newry.

What will be a big movement of refugees out of and inside Northern Ireland has started. A steady stream of women and children flee over the border to Donegal. It is the beginning of what will be the biggest forced population movement in Western Europe since the turmoil at the end of World War Two, in 1945.

In Coalisland, 500 defy the ban on marches and meet in the street. A crowd forces its way into the police station; windows are broken and petrol bombs put through them.

In Armagh, 400 youths march in protest at what is happening in Derry. Paddy O’Hanlon, Nationalist MP for South Armagh, says that they want “to take some of the pressure off Derry”.

Barricades are put up in Dungannon. In Lurgan, Catholic and Protestant crowds face each other. Catholics put up barricades. Bottles and stones are thrown by both sides and a few petrol bombs from the Catholic side. Earlier, a crowd had gone to the RUC station to protest at police actions in Derry.

In Enniskillen, stones and bottles are thrown at the RUC, who have interfered with a meeting (by now, when on 13 August all marches have been banned, illegal) on the events in Derry.

B-Specials are put to man border posts and to guard the Waterside and Fountain Street Protestant areas in Derry.

In Belfast, 200 people attack Hastings St RUC barracks. One group sets up a barrier across the Falls Road at the Divis St junction, and sets it alight with petrol bombs. Police armoured cars smash two barricades.

A big crowd marches down Falls Road, in Belfast, and sets up barricades at the top and at the bottom of the road.

100 RUC are on the adjoining Shankill Road, guarding the streets connecting the Shankill and the Falls.

Northern Ireland prime minister Chichester Clark, having stoked the fire with his talk of a general Catholic insurrection, now tries to bank it down by reiterating on TV his commitment to a civil rights reform programme. That would have been important six months ago, but now events have gone way beyond that.

“Hooligan irresponsibles in our midst, whether they are Protestant or Roman Catholic, are a menace to our prospects as a community”.

He hopes the riots will not be attributed to intransigence on the Government’s part.

“I take my stand upon these essentials – that houses should be allocated by need, that public jobs and appointments should be filled on merit alone. That there should be equal protection for the law-abiding, and equal retribution for the law-breakers. No other course is either possible or moral”.

Yet, he threatens the Catholics with the British army, telling them that he will not shrink from summoning “other than police aid”.

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association warns Chichester Clark that unless police are withdrawn from the Bogside immediately, civil rights meetings will be held in “about 12 places” in the next 24 hours, in defiance of a ban. It is in effect a call for such demonstrations. They are already welling up. But for Clark now the only basis on which peace can be restored is the victory of the RUC and its auxiliaries in the Bogside and its victory over the “republican insurrection”.

He denies that there will be “retaliation” in the Bogside. “We want peace, not vengeance... If the rioters withdraw peacefully to their homes and observe the law, no attempt will be made to exploit the situation. I give this assurance in the name of the Government and in the earnest hope that it may contribute to peace”.

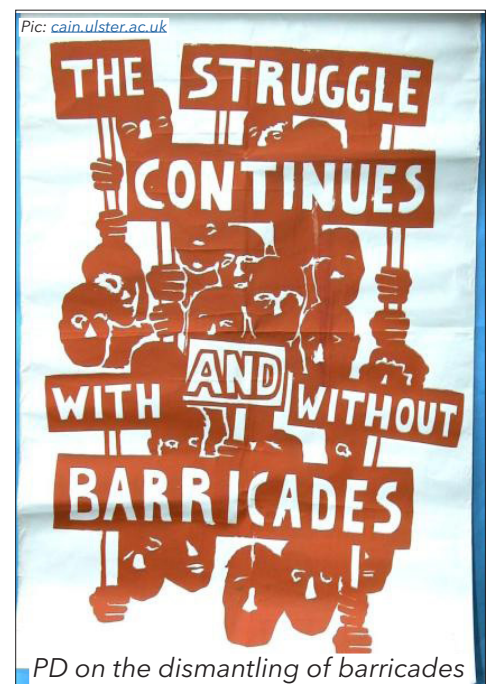
On this he is lying. Fighters, among them Bernadette Devlin, will be jailed after the crisis has passed.

Thursday 14 August

The British Establishment is by now in the grip of undisguised revulsion against the incompetence and irresponsibility of the Stormont Government. The Tory party, of which the Northern Ireland Unionist party at Westminster is an organic part, will pointedly back everything the Labour Government will do in Northern Ireland over the next few months. A prominent Tory leader, Lord Hailsham, will go to the 6 Counties in the wake of the British Army to make that plain to the Unionists.

A *Times* editorial, noting that all marches have been banned in Northern Ireland, says angrily that it should have been done a month earlier.

“The folly of allowing the Apprentice Boys to trail their coats through Derry is now apparent... The reasonably-formulated political demands, the non-violent demonstrations... are all engulfed



in something much more primitive and volcanic, tribal fears and hatreds: this madness, as Chichester Clark called it [on TV] last night”.

Frank Gogarty, chair of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, puts out a CRA statement: “The B-Specials are leading the Paisleyites. They are in tenders [armoured cars] shooting indiscriminately. They are firing into people’s homes. They are shooting all over the place...” He calls for demonstrations throughout Northern Ireland. He attempts to define what is happening:

“It must be among the greatest ironies of Irish history that parts of Northern Ireland are now in open insurrection, demanding that the British government directly intervene...” (Michael Farrell, in his book *The Orange State*, is mistaken in saying that NICRA and PD put out a joint statement).

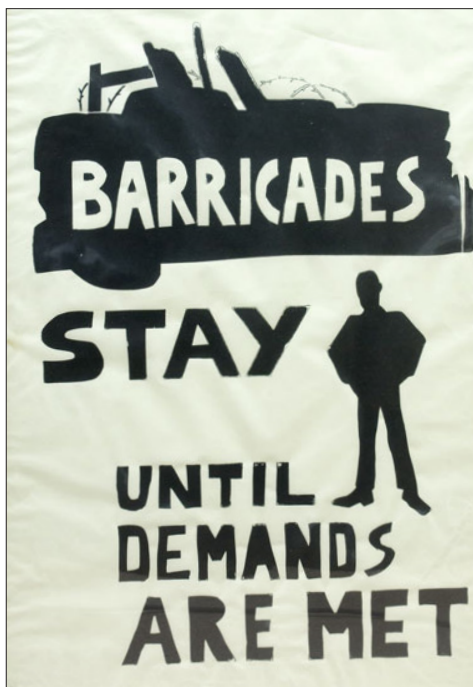
The London NICRA calls on every “able-bodied Irishman to make himself available to go to the North of Ireland for active service”. Similar calls have gone out in the South, and volunteers are being organised to go to “the North”.

Now Clark is finally forced to face the fact that he can’t cope, that Northern Ireland has become ungovernable to the Unionists. The high command of the RUC and the Belfast government call on the British state for help and support.

On Thursday 14 August at about 5.15pm, four hundred British soldiers take to the streets of Derry. Their immediate orders are to prevent Bogside breaking out into the nearby centre of the city.

At first about 200 armed B-Specials join the cordon around the Bogside. They are withdrawn later that night and sent to patrol Derry’s Protestant areas.

A formal announcement will not be made for a few days yet, but in fact control of “security” in Northern Ireland is now beginning to pass from the hands of the Belfast Government to the British Government, with the Army as its instrument. The RUC, including the B-Specials, is about to be put under the control of the British army. The commander of that army, General Freed-



PD poster, 1969

land, will decide whether B-Specials will be deployed in Catholic territory.

His first act is to call off the war with the Bogside.

Contrary to Chichester Clark's threat on TV, the troops do not attempt to enter the Bogside or to remove the barricades. The army respects the wishes of the Bogside. No attempt will be made to remove the barricades by force, then or later.

There is jubilation and the sense that they have won, in the Bogside. With some justification, they feel they have beaten the RUC and the Orange state. To the irony of Irish Catholics calling for London rule over them is now added the paradox of them greeting British troops as liberators and saviours. Much will be made – for instance, in the discussions in IS (as SWP was then called) over IS-SWP's support for the troops – of Bogside people chatting in friendly fashion with soldiers, and bringing them cups of tea.

The British Army leaders are more clear-headed.

A London *Times* report summarises the view of the future expressed by the General Officer Commanding British Forces in Northern Ireland, the man who now holds Northern "security" in his hands: he knows "that the honeymoon for Britain may soon be over and that they may be under attack from two sides" (19 August, 1969).

Eamonn McCann is at this point more or less clear-headed too. So is the chair of the DCDA, Sean Keenan: "Stand firm. Barricades remain. Conduct yourselves in the disciplined fashion that you have shown since the start of the crisis" (*Irish Times*, Aug 20). So is Bernadette Devlin.

Speaking on behalf of the DCDA, McCann announces the terms agreed on for the ceasefire:

1) All B-Specials to be withdrawn; 2) The RUC be restricted to normal police duties; 3) The DCDA will help to keep the peace.

He reiterates what the DCDA is demanding:

1) Disband the B-Specials; 2) Abolish the Stormont Belfast Government; 3) Release all political prisoners; no further political prosecutions.

The barricades are not going to be attacked by the army. They will stay up until the Bogside feel safe taking them down.

McCann tells journalists he "was never happy to see British troops on Irish soil, and it was not clear what their function was to be. If they had come to operate with the RUC against the Bogside, it was clear no one would enter the Bogside with the approval of the people or without a fight." (*Irish Times*, 15 Aug)

He had earlier responded to stories that six French students in the area had come to instruct the Bogside on barricade fighting: "For the information of the police, the people of the Bogside do not need any training from anybody on how to fight the police." (*Irish Times*, 13 August)

Not self-consistently or with politi-

cal coherence (she had called for the British Army to be sent in), but nonetheless to the point, Bernadette Devlin says: "The British Army is no good." She adds: "The RUC should be controlled by British police officers". To Protestants she says: "This is us against the RUC. The Protestants should join us in working for a socialist workers' republic". This is holy water at a funeral – irrelevance.

Devlin says: "we are ready to negotiate with the British Army". But only, she insists, "if the police keep out and the B-Specials are disbanded". She tells the people of Bogside: "Defend the barricades to the last. Do not let them come in... This fight is between the RUC and us." Unfortunately, it is not.

Paddy Doherty, the "SDLPish" Vice-Chair of the Derry Citizens' Defence Association, says much the same thing. He tells the Army commanders that "we will remain at war with the RUC until [our] demands are met." (*Irish Times*, 18 Aug).

Devlin reports to the Bogside on the phone conversation she has just had with prime minister Chichester Clark. When she asked him whether the army is to replace or assist the RUC, he replied: "to assist them". Devlin asks the crowd: "Do you still want to sing, 'We Shall Overcome'?"

She tries to persuade them not to disperse, and not to rely on the army. They are divided. Some boo, and some shout, "Back to the barricades". Most of them disagree with Devlin and follow the "moderates".

She demands of Harold Wilson: "Call an immediate constitutional conference, and settle the Irish question once and for all... The constitution should be suspended immediately." The Six Counties had been gerrymandered at birth, in 1920-2, to give Protestants a majority. A Six Counties constitutional conference will solve nothing at all, as the one called in 1974 will demonstrate.

But the Battle of the Bogside has brought out the best in Bernadette Devlin. The role of intransigent militant which she played from 12-14 August is one prescribed and described in the culture of song and story that saturates her Catholic-Nationalist background. She has inhabited that role very well. Yet her expressed trust in senior British policemen – calls for "British standards" in Northern Ireland had been central to the early civil rights movement – and her call for a "constitutional conference" shows that Devlin has not thereby ceased to be muddled, eclectic and prone to glib pseudo-solutions.

The exhausted, jubilant Bogside disperses to their homes. Paddy Doherty (a mainstream Catholic) Vice Chair of the Derry Citizens' Defence Association, is carried on their shoulders, and leads them in the singing of "We Shall Overcome".

Later, soldiers and residents chat across the barricades.

The British commander, Colonel Todd, meets members of the Derry

Citizens' Defence Association, and they agree a three-point peace plan. All B-Specials will be withdrawn from the area, and the RUC will be restricted to normal peace duties. In return, the DCDA agrees to help maintain the peace.

Thursday 14 August, Belfast

That it will be necessary for the British Army to play the central "security" role all over the 6 County state has not yet been decided. That will be determined by what happens in Belfast in the next two days and nights.

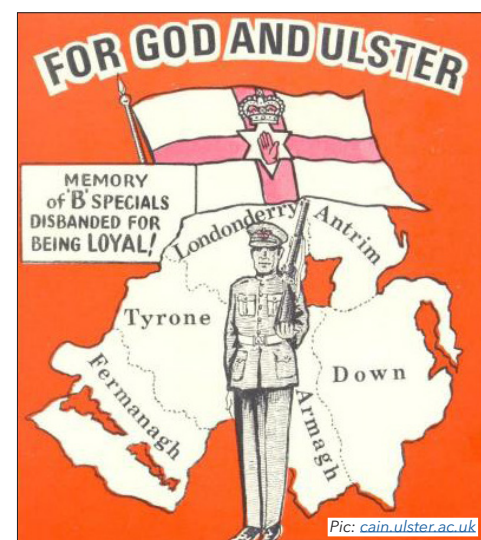
Four hours after a sort of peace is restored in Derry, fierce fighting erupts in Belfast, where the army has not yet been deployed.

On the morning of August 14, the *Belfast Newsletter* appears with a main front page headline, "'Eire's Clumsy Intrusion' Lashed by the PM". There is a big picture of Bernadette Devlin in jeans and jumper, flagstone raised above her head to be dashed to the ground and broken into pieces small enough to be thrown, the very image of the incorrigible taig rebel. Below the picture is another headline "Eire Mob Crosses Border Into Newry". They have taken over most of the town.

Catholics in the Falls had already taken limited action in solidarity with Derry. Now Protestants go on the offensive. That evening the Shankill erupts against the people of the Catholic areas, in a spectacular mass assault. A large crowd descends on the Falls Road. They surge in the wake of the RUC, and the effect is of a joint movement, as in Derry.

"People from the Shankill Road, wearing white arm bands, moved north to the Crumlin Road or Ardoyne and South on the Falls.

"At Hooker Street, scene of some of the worst rioting in Belfast two weeks



ago, the Loyalist crowd, ordered by the men wearing arm bands, hurled more than 100 petrol bombs at houses in Hooker St and broke down a barricade which the Catholic people of the street had erected.

"A force of riot police with shields stood by as the crowd set fire to houses, a public house, the Black Rose Inn, which has twice been fired in the last fortnight, and [another tavern] across the road.

"The police, who had arrived in two tenders and about five Land Rovers, stood across the Crumlin Road while the Loyalists ran in front of them, smashed their way through a barricade and set houses in Hooker Street alight. Then the police, backed by three armoured cars, went into Hooker Street with batons drawn.

"A hundred yards from the burning public house a crowd surged across to the Catholic side. They hurled stones and petrol bombs. Police tried to break the attack – then an armoured car was called in.

"As it drove up, there were four bursts of automatic fire – a senior policeman said he thought it was a sub-machine gun.

"On the Falls Road as Loyalists moved South a group of Catholics gathered and marched to Hooker Street police station, which they attacked with petrol bombs and stones.

"Police moved into the road with about seven armoured cars and scattered the crowds to right and left. The road was sealed off."

Barricades are thrown up, and defended as in Derry, with stones and petrol bombs. Now the whole panoply of RUC power of repression is thrown at the Catholics, including one heavy machine gun able to penetrate through brick: a boy of nine, Patrick Rooney, is shot dead through the walls of his bedroom...

IRA men are few and few of them have guns, but the few who do, use them. There is one light machine-gun, operated by a middle-aged man who had dropped out of the IRA many years earlier.

Pubs are burned in the Crumlin Road. Some factories are fired, reportedly by Catholics. Four Catholics are shot dead by police fire: one Protestant is killed by a shot in Divis Street. Two people, one

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a Protestant and one a Catholic die, shot by civilians. And the fighting is still spreading.

In Newry there are attempts to put up barricades, and fighting with the police.

In Portadown, Catholic and Protestant crowds gather and confront each other.

In Dungiven, the Orange Hall is burned, and the courthouse, and the premises of the Ulster Bank. In Armagh, a Catholic is shot dead.

600 soldiers of the 26 Counties army (three companies) have been moved close to the border, and there they halt.

The *Times* (15 August) reports that the "government here has been watching anxiously reports from the Republic of Ireland as rumours of large-scale IRA activity and Irish army manoeuvre swept the province".

Dublin's Minister for External Affairs, Dr. Hillery, goes to London to talk to Callaghan.

The left in Belfast is less prominent than in Derry. Michael Farrell will later tell the historian of the People's Democracy, Paul Arthur, that PD had only ten people mobilised in Belfast at that time. On 14 August PD – Farrell and others – follow where Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin have led two days earlier, and call for British intervention. The IS in Britain (forerunner of today's SWP), with which Farrell is linked, has implicitly been calling for 26 Counties intervention.

The People's Democracy statement is headlined in the *Belfast Newsletter*: "Suspend Stormont Junta".

It reads: "The welcoming response for the British troops in Derry has shown that the basic cause of the trouble there was the undisciplined and biased RUC.

"Not content with provoking war in the Bogside, the Ulster government, hell-bent on self-destruction, has now put 8,000 members of their murder gang – the B-Specials – on the streets. This vicious, undisciplined fascist band has already killed one man and wounded several others within hours of their mobilisation.

"It is intolerable that the people of the North should again be subjected to a reign of sectarian terror. Any government which would entrust law and order to this savage gang is unfit to rule.



"The British government must suspend the Stormont junta immediately if more lives are not to be lost in Northern Ireland".

Though it coincides with the great eruption of Protestant-Catholic conflict in Belfast on 14 August, this statement is far more politically calculating than the call for help by Devlin and McCann on 12 August. The author is responding to the response of Derry Catholics to the coming of the troops, whose coming was the end of the RUC war on the Bogside people. It may have been worked out jointly with the leaders of IS-SWP: the telephones have not ceased to work. In any case this statement signals the new "line" of IS-SWP too.

Friday-Saturday 15-16 August

On the evening of 15 August the British army does what has been done in Derry – it goes on the streets of Belfast to relieve the RUC and separate the fighters.

The Army enters the Falls Road, but not the other areas of Belfast where Protestant and Catholics clashes occur. In Belfast as in Derry the army makes no attempt to force its way into the barricaded Catholic areas or to remove their barricades.

Catholic houses are burnt that night by Protestants at Bombay Street (Falls Road area) and Brookfield Street (Crumlin Road). After whole Catholic streets have been burned down in Belfast on the 16th the army enters the Crumlin Road area.

According to the Scarman tribunal, 1,820 families flee their homes in July-August 1969. Over 80% per cent of the families are Catholic. Ten people are killed; 900 injured. 16 factories and 170 houses are burned down; a further 417 houses damaged by fire.

Over the longer period from August 1969 to February 1973, according to another estimate, between 8,000 and 15,000 families will move as a result of sectarian intimidation.

James Callaghan makes a statement to, so to speak, accompany the troops: There will be no constitutional change in Northern Ireland without the "consent of the people of the province".

There are hopeful signs too. On Wednesday 15 August at a 4,000-strong mass meeting, Belfast shipyard workers declare for peace, and stage a token stoppage at 4pm to show their "concern". They pledge to keep sectarian conflict out of the shipyards. Minister of Commerce Roy Bradford addressed the meeting. Alex [Sandy] Scott, chair of the shipyard stewards, rejects the story that there has been fighting in the shipyard. 2,000 workers, Catholic and Protestant, at the Michelin tyre works, Belfast, also proclaim that they want peace.

Lord Fenner Brockway, chair of the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster, calls for the suspension of the constitution – for direct rule of Northern Ireland from London. The call is not new from the Labour left.

Monday 18 August

Armed groups have besieged the RUC station at Catholic Crossmaglen. There is a lorry-load of men, with guns, including sub machine guns. Hand grenades are thrown through the window of the RUC station. They are driven off after an hour. The terrible future is already stirring in the womb.

But the British Army is now in control of security in Northern Ireland. In a few days it will call in the guns of the B-Specials for safekeeping in special depots. It will have a short honeymoon period. The barricades will not finally come down in Belfast until mid-September – by agreement – and in Derry, again by agreement, in the second week of October.

The aftermath

The crisis that erupted in Derry on 12 August, the breakdown of the Northern Ireland state system, would be followed after October – after the decision to abolish the B-Specials and a major gun battle by RUC and British soldiers against Protestant gunmen on the Shankill – by a lull. Then it would erupt again, in old and familiar forms.

In fact it would not be resolved for decades. Soon it became clear that the whole Northern Ireland system had been sapped and undermined. From August 1969 the British Army acted as an emergency scaffolding to stop disintegration. The Belfast parliament would be abolished by Britain in March 1972.

What opened in mid-1969 was a major revolutionary crisis. Analysing the experience of revolutions, including Russia's, Lenin had defined three conditions necessary for a revolution to take place. The old order is no longer able to go on in the old way; the ruled, or enough of them, are no longer prepared to go on in the old way; and an alternative to the old order is available.

The Northern Ireland Catholics were no longer willing to go on in the old way, and the old order could not go on in the old way because of the Catholic revolt and Britain's commitment to reform. The great gap in the scenario was in relation to Lenin's third condition: what could replace the old order?

The working class was radically divided and in both its sections, Protestant and Catholic, politically and intellectually hegemonised by "its own" bourgeoisie and petty bourgeoisie and their national-communist ideas.

The workers in the South were powerfully militant "on the job", but in no political condition to reshape society. The working class had no independent political organisation to make proposals as to how the divided people of Ireland, or of Northern Ireland, could democratically rearrange their affairs. There was no possibility of a working-class political force to fill the gap.

In neither of the national or communal groups was there a revolutionary socialist force able to plausibly propose a democratic settlement of the "constitutional conflict" (whether Ireland should be independent or affiliated with Brit-

ain) and working-class unity on the issues that had led to breakdown and the beginning of communal-national civil war in Northern Ireland.

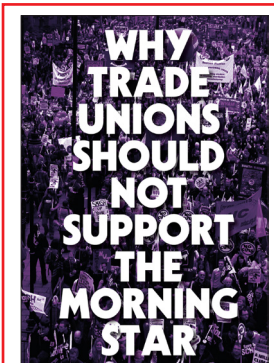
The left in Ireland, such as it was, used political categories – pro-imperialism, anti-imperialism, sectarianism, anti-sectarianism, British occupation, and so on – to obscure the fundamental issue, the nature of the Catholic-nationalist/Protestant-Unionist divide.

The left was solidly on the Catholic side, the side of the Six Counties' oppressed of the previous 50 years and previous centuries. It was right and necessary to be on that side. But the left shared middle-class Catholic-nationalist ideas, changed only by re-expressing them in the left's own political language, for instance, the "Trotskyist" notion that Ireland was experiencing, or could be made to experience, a "permanent revolution" in which the Catholic nationalist movement would grow over into united-working-class power and socialism.

From 1970 Northern Ireland would settle into a long low-level communal conflict, half-smothered by the British state, and entwined with a Catholic-nationalist Provisional IRA war against that British state. It was a hopeless and unwinnable war. The Provisional IRA had no policy for the big Protestant-British minority but to subjugate it. Since they could not themselves do that, and civil war could not but result in continued partition, perhaps with a smaller "Protestant state", the Provisional IRA were reduced to trying to force Britain to "persuade" the Protestant community into a united Ireland.

Things have settled down – or seem to have – after the long travail, into the present system of intricately structured bureaucratically organised sectarian power-sharing – a system that, though it is "better" than war, cannot but work to perpetuate the communalism it enshrines in its workings, and therefore cannot but work to perpetuate the division in the Irish working class.

What happens on the level of big events such as those in Northern Ireland happens because, everything being as it is, it has to. In retrospect what happens assumes the character of inevitability. In fact, things that in retrospect were part of an inexorable movement of given facts may have been in flux before they settled into the congealed jumble of facts that make the event which in retrospect we see as inevitable. Other things may have been possible. □



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