
AFTERMATH OF DERRY

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(This concludes the article on Northern Ireland printed in our November issue.—Ed. LM.)

When Capt. Terence O'Neill, MP became Prime Minister in 1963 there was a glimmer of hope. He talked 'fair' and even went to the extent of meeting Mr. Sean Lemass, the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic. He spoke of the need for 'better community relations' and went about Northern Ireland, Britain and elsewhere laying the trail for such. But he met, within his own Party, the strongest and

dirtiest opposition. Mr. Brian Faulkner, Minister of Commerce and Mr. W. Craig, Minister of Home Affairs, in his Cabinet, demonstrated to all public and political life here and in other places, that they wanted none of his 'soft line.' He actually had to fight an attempt to remove him as Prime Minister two years ago when he was on holiday in the Home Counties of England. With this opposition, there came the rise of Paisleyism. The Rev. Ian Paisley, who got his doctorate in some bible-belt college in the Southern States of America, arose to defend Northern Ireland against everybody—Catholics and all sections of the Protestant Churches if they even mentioned any idea of Christian unity with their Catholic brethren. And he was not repudiated by many Cabinet Ministers, outside O'Neill and his cousin. Mr. Phelim O'Neil, MP for North Antrim, and the latter came in for much abuse when he called Paisley a 'fascist.'

O'Neill had promised reforms in the sphere of jobs, housing, votes and the bringing of life here more into line with that of Britain. Many wanted to give him the opportunity to do so. He received every encouragement from all responsible sections of the community. Class differences in Northern Ireland are much bound up with the unfinished national question and it is a measure of the responsibility of the people that all were willing to give O'Neill 'his chance.'

But time has a habit of passing. And the looked-for reforms did not seem to be in the offing. Queen's Speech followed Queen's Speech and eventually it was agreed that business votes would no longer be allowed for Stormont elections and the University representation (4 seats) would also be discontinued. Nothing more—nothing less. The business vote had ceased to have much meaning because so many local firms were not in local hands and the directors of the monopolies don't worry about such votes—they require the State to look after their interests without the bother of going to the polls. A new University was to be opened at Coleraine, Co. Antrim and it was not possible to give continued representation to the graduates at Queens University, Belfast, without extending it to the future graduates at Ulster University, Coleraine. So, actually, O'Neill and his Cabinet gave nothing in the way of reforms.

The Civil Rights Association, which was established about three years ago, and which had on its Council representatives of all shades of political opinion, including Unionist, examined the situation. They decided to press for reforms all along the line so that there would be no second-class citizens left in Northern Ireland and that all forces, Unionist and opposition, would be given the right to play

a full part in the community. There were no Republican—no Communist, or other kinds of plots.

The Constitution of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association states in its Objects (2) 'The aim of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association shall be to assist in the maintenance of civil liberties, including freedom of speech, propaganda and assembly. The Association shall advance measures for the recovery and enlargement of such liberties and shall take steps as the Association deem necessary to that end.' The Constitution is based on the Constitution of the British Civil Liberties Association—from whom we had every assistance and encouragement.

Our work was very quiet, much unnoticed except by the police and civil authorities, until we were asked to assist the people of the Coalisland and Dungannon areas (Co. Tyrone) to protest against blatant discrimination—against Catholics—in the matter of Council house distribution. This brought in, in the nature of things, denial of the right to vote in local government elections at 21—no house, no vote—and jobs. All due notice, under the Public Order Act, 1951, was given to the police authorities about the march from Coalisland to Dungannon and the meeting to be held in Dungannon Square—a meeting place used as 'a right' by Government supporters. The organisers were asked, after a long period of time, to re-route the place of meeting into an area known as 'the Catholic Ghetto' in Dungannon. This was done by way of the service of an order a few hours before the march (4½ miles) was to begin. The organisers refused to put a sectarian complex on the march and meeting. They, the 3,000 marchers were met, outside Dungannon city, with a cordon, hundreds of policemen, police vehicles and dogs and refused entry to one of Ireland's most ancient cities—all to 'keep order' as the Paisley faction had occupied the Square in the city. The march was halted at the cordon and the meeting took place. It is difficult to describe that march and meeting. The people were so orderly and responsible and now, in Northern Ireland history, the 24th August has become a memorable day.

An appeal from Derry citizens to organise a march and meeting was then received. Arrangements were made, with all responsible political groups excepting the Unionists, to go forward for October 5. A short march through the city and a meeting in the Diamond—a historic place and the scene of many meetings of all sections of the people—excepting in the past number of years when the Government authorities have refused to allow other than Orange Order and Apprentice Boys of Derry Parades. The excuse was that the

Government 'wishes to preserve peace and order.' The result: no organisations other than those supporting the Government were allowed to use the Diamond or enter the Walls of Derry.

For the Civil Rights March on October 5, no objections were offered by the police authorities until late on Friday October 4. Then orders under the Public Order Act were served on local Derry people and loud speaker equipment was seized. It was learnt, on the morning of Saturday October 5, that the parade could not take the route notified to the police and, under no considerations, could a meeting be held in the Diamond. The parade started from the Distillery Brae. It was met by forces of the police and, after due warning, was not prevented from entering into Duke Street—one of the entries to the Walls of Derry. At the top of Duke Street there was a police cordon and three armoured vehicles across. A request was made to police to allow the marchers to go on. This was the first time that the batons were used and many went to hospital. A meeting was held by the marchers and those present were asked to disperse. They were doing so . . . a gap was created between them and the police and then the police charged and it was found that there was a police cordon at the *bottom* of the street and the marchers could not get out. Then two water cannons were brought in and the batoning and hosing went on indiscriminately. Even into areas of the city where people were out doing their week-end shopping. No one present will ever forget Derry on Saturday, October 5.

It must be made clear that the terrible events had nothing to do with the Derry local authority, the local police or local unionist or other such associations. The decision to baton and hose the marchers, and everyone who came in their way, was taken at Government level. The order was given by Mr. Craig, Minister of Home Affairs. The Prime Minister, Capt. O'Neill, that morning took himself off to Leicester in Britain to open an 'Ulster Week' there. He left the people to their fate and to meet a militarised police force that one could only imagine existed inside a fascist country.

The repercussions have been startling. From all over Northern Ireland many who had begun to despair of any simple reforms have been galvanised into activity—for Civil Rights. Students, 3,000 strong, from Queen's University, demonstrated on the next Wednesday and staged a three-hour sit-down in the heart of Belfast—for Civil Rights. (They were met by the police and the forces of Paisleyism—but they met the situation and made it clear that they would be back again.) Students at the new University in Coleraine—one of the showpieces of the Unionists and denied to Derry City—threatened

to march in Coleraine. All over Northern Ireland statements, discussions and debates are being organised. The press and television has come from all over the world to report the events and to find out what conditions really are like.

There is no doubt that the Unionist Party does not welcome this publicity. But by their own action, they have forced it. They can no longer refuse to treat all with the same due respect and dignity. They can no longer discriminate against any sections of the community in the sphere of housing, jobs, votes and the right of free speech and assembly. The people have learnt to stand up and be counted.

They can no longer claim to be in favour of 'keeping in step with Britain' because they are the people who refuse to put into operation British conditions in Northern Ireland. They are the irrevocable opponents of real freedom with Britain and the British people. And they must be exposed. When that has been done, the British people, through the labour and trade union movement will at last understand that the people across the Irish Sea are not their enemies—they want to be their friends in conditions of voluntary unity, respect and freedom.

As Mr. John McAnerney, Secretary of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, has stated (quoted in the *Irish News*, September 17):

'The key element in all this is the power that resides in Unionism to proclaim justice and right for *all* citizens, irrespective of their political or religious creed. The intelligent use of that power is the only hope of change in the situation which is charged by the Civil Rights Association.

There will be no need for Civil Rights bodies or marches if, in the exercise of power, at all levels, the Government sees to it that civil rights, of whatever sort, are enjoyed by everybody . . . injustice (cannot) be cured by blandly ignoring them, or castigating others for pointing them out.'

Seasonal Greetings and a Peaceful New Year
to all our readers and friends
