

NORTHERN IRELAND -

the mailed fist

A RECORD OF ARMY & POLICE BRUTALITY FROM AUG. 9- NOV. 9, 1971

With a foreword by TONY SMYTHE,

Secretary of the National Council for CIVIL LIBERTIES, London



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Cover Picture

At a passive resistance sit-down demonstration held in Londonderry on 18th August, 1971, Messrs. John Hume, M. P., Ivan Cooper, M. P., Hugh Logue, a school-teacher, Michael Canavan, Chairman of the Citizens Central Council, Derry, as well as most of the demonstrators, were sprayed with purple dye by the British army. The photograph shows Hugh Logue being subsequently dragged away to prison by the hair of his head. (Irish Times 19/8/71. Photo: Wm. Carson, Derry)

CAMPAIGN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

IN NORTHERN IRELAND

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13th December, 1971

Dear Reader,

Our Campaign was founded in January 1964 in order to collect and publicise the facts of discrimination done by the Ulster Unionist Government and its various agencies and supporters, against the mainly Catholic minority. We have been responsible in all for twenty-four publications consisting of booklets, pamphlets, leaflets and Newsletters. In that time we have been accused of inaccuracy only once when we confused the christian names of two men with an identical, unusual surname. We found ourselves involved with the processes of the law. I can assure you that in this booklet we are jealously guarding our reputation for accuracy. I believe you will read the record which follows with mounting horror.

Violence begets violence. We have been revolted at the recent indiscriminate murders by bomb and bullet. We bitterly resent the negligence of successive British Governments in their failure to supervise the Unionists and thereby maintain a healthy democracy in Northern Ireland. Instead, Britain has allowed the situation to deteriorate, with increasingly heavy loss of life, and culminating in these shameful killings.

Yours faithfully,

(Mrs) Patricia McCLUSKEY Chairman

FOR THE CAMPAIGN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

PREFACE NO. 2.

When the Campaign for Social Justice first asked me to write the Introduction to this report I had no hesitation in accepting. I had good reason to admire the way in which the Campaign over a long period of time has tried to place the facts of the Northern Ireland situation before the public in Ireland and the United Kingdom. For years they suffered a fate shared with the NCCL. No-one wanted to know. Those who did know did not care. It would have been so easy out of frustration to join the conspiracy of silence, yet the Campaign persevered and eventually succeeded in making the development of a civil rights movement possible.

Democracy relies on the free flow of information and the ability of those who govern to make decisions on the basis of known facts. By these standards the United Kingdom has failed in relation to Northern Ireland. The central paradox and therefore one of the causes is that, whereas Britain is still a democracy, there has been no democracy in Northern Ireland since Partition. It has been governed by one political faction devoted to the maintenance of sectarian privileges and kept in power by the apparatus of a police state supported whenever necessary, by the military. It is a closed society largely populated and exclusively run by people with closed minds. But if blame is to be allocated, it cannot, of course, be confined to the Six Counties. Mutual fear and distrust has been compounded by the more benign sectarianism of the Republic which has totally failed to put its own house in order. More important perhaps, successive Westminster governments, which are responsible for order and good government in the Province, have through short-sightedness and neglect assisted in the construction of a monumental tragedy from which it appears there is now no escape. There is, in effect, no party to the dispute which can be said to be without guilt, save for groups like the Campaign for Social Justice and the NCCL which have consistently demanded the extension of ordinary standards of civil liberty and social justice to the citizens of Northern Ireland.

I am of course saying nothing new. The conclusions of the NCCL Commission of Enquiry which examined the purpose and effect of the Special Powers Acts and whose report was published in 1938 remain equally relevant today

- Firstly, that through the operation of the Special Powers Act contempt has been begotten for the representative institutions of government.
- Secondly, that through the use of Special Powers individual liberty is no longer protected by law, but is at the arbitrary disposition of the Executive. This abrogation of the rule of law has been so practised as to bring the freedom of the subject into contempt.
- Thirdly, that the Northern Irish Government has used Special Powers towards securing the domination of one particular political faction and, at the same time, towards curtailing the lawful activities of its opponents. The driving of legitimate movements underground into illegality, the intimidating or branding as law-breakers of their adherents, however innocent of crime, has tended to encourage violence and bigotry on the part of the Government's supporters as well as to beget in its opponents an intolerance of the "law and order" thus maintained. The Government's policy is thus driving its opponents into the ways of extremists".

The continued existence of the Special Powers Act and other repressive legislation, in addition to the indignities and inequalities heaped on the Catholic minority, are a major cause of the events which led inexorably towards civil war. The introduction of internment under Special Powers exasperated the situation, led to 154 deaths and removed any remaining vestiges of civil liberty.

To date 980 people, members of the minority almost to a man have been arbitrarily taken into custody. Many have been abused physically and psychologically. Many have been interned without trial. For none of them does there exist any protection whatsoever in law. This is merely the background to a situation which has caused immeasurable suffering throughout Northern Ireland and which, viewed in retrospect, will leave a profoundly destructive mark on the reputation of the society we live in.

In one sense, the crimes committed against individuals and their families pale into insignificance beside the crime of internment itself and our collective failure to prevent other crimes committed, in our names by, Government, police and military. At the same time civil liberty is about people. If established institutions can offer no remedy, no redress, if Government conspires to silence the victims of injustice, if all opportunities for the rational assessment of events are submerged in a welter of emotion and prejudice, if the independent investigation of allegations is just not possible, the only course left is to publish what is available.

If I had any doubts about the publication of allegations which cannot be verified and investigated, these were resolved when the report of the Compton Enquiry was published. From the outset of the internment operation, it was inevitable that serious allegations would be made. On the 31st August the Committee of Enquiry was appointed. By September a number of statements had been assembled by, amongst others, the Association for Legal Justice and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. They were gradually made available to MPs and the press. Some details were included in an NCCL open letter to the Prime Minister dated 20th September. Yet in spite of the availability of information very little actually appeared in the British press. My own initial reaction was one of skepticism. At first reading I found myself emotionally and intellectually unable to absorb stories of helicopters, canvas bags, obstacle courses and the like. It was only when I realised that the allegations could not possibly have been co-ordinated that I felt able to write to the Prime Minister that there was "overwhelming prima facie evidence of serious maltreatment and torture".

The NCCL felt strongly that the Compton Enquiry could not possibly resolve the problem and we raised all the objections about its constitution and procedure which are referred to elsewhere in this report. To a large extent the publication of the report tended to confirm our view that the whole truth was unlikely to emerge without a far-ranging independent judicial enquiry. Only two victims gave evidence and only one of these in person. Only 40 individual allegations were considered. On the other hand the wealth of counter-evidence from police and military gave an incestuous touch to the whole operation. No-one seems to have been more aware of the limitations and constraints of the Enquiry than Sir Edmund Compton and his colleagues. The report was cautious, painstaking and at times disingenuous. Yet in spite of the low key approach, the broad substance of every major allegation was confirmed or, where there was a conflict of evidence, left unresolved. There were very few categorical denials. The substantive difference between the findings of the Enquiry and many of the statements contained in this report was not based on fact but interpretations of, or explanations for the facts.

The total impact of the findings turned essentially on a semantic differentiation between "brutality" and "ill-treatment". "We considered that brutality is an inhuman or savage form of cruelty, and that cruelty implies a disposition to inflict suffering, coupled with indifference to, or pleasure in, the victim's pain." Essentially the distinction turned on the question of intent. The irrelevance becomes clear in the case of a Mr. Gilmore who at short range was shot in the stomach by a rubber bullet. Mr. Gilmore, says Compton, "did indeed suffer ill treatment, the cause being a mistake on the part of the soldier who fired the rubber bullet, without any suggestion that his object was to hit, still less to hurt, the arrested man". Leaving aside the competence of a trained soldier who, without wishing to hit or hurt someone, managed in fact to do so at close range, from the victim's point of view the explanation is somewhat academic. My own view is that Compton, By scratching the surface, provided an open invitation which was anticipated in this Report, to delve deeper into the muck-heap of internment.

Aside from substantiating many unpleasant facts, the Report and its aftermath has other important implications. It has become a truism to remark that in war situations the first casualty is the truth. In Nazi Germany Goebbels developed a propaganda machine which has been widely admired and imitated by military dictatorships the world over. In the world of today it needs no sinister genius to market falsehood and distortion. I have already remarked of the Compton Enquiry's curious manipulation of language. Judging by the comments on its publication the hint was well taken. Indeed it rapidly became clear that the Government's supporters were convinced that, by constantly reiterating an incantation to the effect that the troops and the police had been totally exonerated and were doing

INTRODUCTION

Internment was put into effect on Monday 9th August, 1971. By the end of the week the first reports of brutality by the British Army began to appear in Irish newspapers.

To people living in Northern Ireland and continuously exposed to publicity by British press, radio and television, which never ceases to extol the simple virtues of the British Tommy, it was hard to take in.

Realisation was forced upon us by a column in the "Sunday Press" on the 15th August, written by a journalist of international standing, Prionsias Mac Aongnusa. He told of how prisoners were used as a screen in army lorries being driven round the streets of Belfast. We quote from the article: "I can now state that the actions of the British in many cases closely resembled those of the Nazi authorities when arresting Jewish people in the thirties.

Men were dragged from their beds, beaten, in some cases not allowed to dress fully, their hands handcuffed behind their backs, then in many cases, they were thrown into lorries as if they were sacks.

In a number of cases, when lorries were full to the brim with prisoners and soldiers, extra prisoners were tied with ropes to the backs of the vehicles and dragged slowly along behind them."

"When Seamus O Tuathail, the well known journalist and former editor of the United Irishman, was arrested in Ton Street, he was viciously manhandled by soldiers. There are conflicting reports as to whether he was dragged along behind a jeep or lorry or whether he was actually placed in the vehicle.

My information is that he appeared to be seriously injured during the course of his arrest and that his subsequent treatment in custody on Monday has left him in a very bad state".

"Mr. Desmond O'Hagan, a lecturer at 'Stranmillis Teachers' Training College, was treated in an exceptionally brutal manner; indeed, a feature now emerging of the arrests is the special and very personal form of brutality reserved for prisoners who could be considered intellectuals, writers and thinkers.

Mr. O'Hagan had a bag placed over his head, his hands were handcuffed behind his back and he was tied by a rope to a vehicle and dragged along the street. Efforts to find out what his "present physical condition is have so far failed, but there are disturbing reports that he may have been permanently injured.

In at least two cases soldiers ceremonially urinated on prisoners lying helpless on the floors of lorries. In all cases that I have investigated so far, prisoners were verbally abused and the language of the soldiers was exceptionally foul.

At Girdwood Park army camp all prisoners were viciously and brutally attacked by scores of soldiers while hundreds of other soldiers looked on and cheered. Alsatian dogs were set at them and they were systematically beaten, made to run around barefoot on broken glass and verbally abused.

The special helicopter torture, associated with Americans in Vietnam, was used at Girdwood on Monday morning. Bags were placed over prisoners' heads, after which they were bundled into helicopters which flew around for a time. They were then thrown out of the still-airborne machines. At this point, the helicopters were but a few feet off the ground, but as the prisoners would not have been aware of this, the mental torture suffered would have been tremendous".

The atrocity stories, printed day after day in Irish newspapers, were ignored by the British press and the other news media.

Only on the 17th October 1971, when the prestigious "Sunday Times" of London printed a detailed report submitted by its 'Insight' team, did the British public learn what its cherished Army had been up to in Ulster.

Miss Bernadette Devlin M.P. made it very clear that she and her associates had made the facts available to every newspaper office in Fleet Street, London in the first week of September. Her efforts were ignored (Irish Times 20th October, 1971).

Our own contempt extends to the Unionist press in Northern Ireland for its neglect of duty in not informing the Protestant people what was being done in their name in the places of detention.

On the 21st August, Surgeon J. Patrick Lane returned to the Ministry of Defence all his medals and honorable discharge papers from the British army. "I am convinced from my work as a surgeon" he said, "that Army brutality has taken place".

Surgeon Lane, who is known to have examined Liam Shannon, has claimed that he was subjected to a variety of physical and psychological torture.

Mr. Lane served as a surgical specialist under Sir Richard Turnbull, former Governor of Aden, when he was Governor of Tanganyika and he offered to sit on any medical board.

A group of doctors from Falls and Ballymurphy areas sent signed statements to Cardinal Conway substantiating the Cardinal's public allegations of Army brutality.

There is other evidence from doctors who examined internees but as we go to press there are court cases pending and the matters are 'sub judice'.

One might well ask why the situation in Northern Ireland was allowed to deteriorate to the extent that so much brutality has been thought necessary by the British.

Detailed explanations are available, but roughly the position has been as follows:

In 1921 the British Government, pressurised by the rebellious Edward Carson and his armed adherents, the Ulster Covenanters, partitioned Ireland. The Protestant Unionists were allocated six counties containing a two-thirds majority of voters supporting their point of view. To maintain this ascendancy down the years, the Unionists regulated the numbers of Catholic nationalists allowed to remain in the area by discriminating against them in jobs and houses. These two unchristian methods were found necessary because the Catholic birth rate has always been twice the Protestant. The upshot has been that, even today, Catholics still make up only one third of the total population (full documentation with analysis of Census of Population figures is available in "The Plain Truth" 2nd Edition, from the Campaign for Social Justice). Thus the repeated claim of the Unionists to do what they think fit because they 'are the democratically elected Government of Northern Ireland' is spurious. They are still the Government because they have shifted a large percentage of their potential opponents out of the country for the past fifty years.

The first stirrings of what was to later become the civil rights movement occurred in Dungannon in 1963. In 1964, before the successful election of his party to power, Mr. Harold Wilson, the Labour leader, promised that, if elected, he would initiate the just society in Ireland.

Unfortunately, Mr. Wilson did nothing until forced to act by world opinion. This was aroused by the Unionist attempt to beat the Civil Rights movement into the ground at Londonderry on October 5th, 1968.

The efforts that the British Labour Government then made were slowly improving the situation. Reform was accelerated after

the attack by the Unionist police, the Ulster Special Constabulary and Protestant Ultras on the Falls area of Belfast in August, 1969 * We can state unequivocally that at that time there was only a handful of active Republicans in the whole of Northern Ireland, and even these had very few guns (it has been said that there were only eight guns in the Falls area). A full report of that time can be read in a book by an English journalist Max Hastings, 'Ulster 1969', Gollancz.

The Conservative Party won the British General Election in 1970. Being the party of 'big business' they have a reputation for a lack of compassion. Their political philosophy also embraces a dedication to 'law and order'.

May we also somewhat cynically note that the Ulster Unionists have never sent less than nine Members of Parliament out of a possible twelve to vote with their Conservative colleagues at Westminster.

In the past, British statesmen have not troubled to inform themselves properly about Irish affairs. Both they and the Army leaders have accepted the onesided version of events from the Unionist Government and the hardline Protestant-dominated Royal Ulster Constabulary.

Again and again we have been dismayed as a new, relatively unknowing Cabinet Minister has made halfhearted attempts to remedy the situation which has steadily deteriorated since 1968. So it was with the new Tory Government in June 1970.

Anti-Unionist public representatives from Members of Parliament to local councillors felt the change of Government within a month. The Unionists started to backtrack on the Reforms imposed by the previous Labour Government. This 'delay and distortion of the Reforms'*** inadequate though they originally were, coupled with police and army brutality, caused militancy to grow from day to day.

As soon as Gerry Fitt was elected to the London Parliament he continually exposed Unionist injustices and warned the various Governments of what was likely to happen if a change was not made. This was reinforced by repeated visits to London by various Stormont M.P.s and by continuous individual pamphletting of members there by the Campaign for Social Justice in Northern Ireland.

The horrors of the escalation, the grotesque errors of judgement of British soldiers, and the enormous expense involved have at last given the Conservatives cause to think.

* The British Labour Government appointed an English judge, Lord Justice Scarman, to investigate the events of August 1969. We charge that the result of his Enquiry is being suppressed. A preliminary version at least should before now have been made available.

** "Delay and distortion of the Reforms" the very apt description by Mr. Jack Lynch, Prime Minister of the Republic of Ireland,

They must surely have become aware of their loss of prestige in the eyes of the world.

The nine Unionist members of the Westminster Parliament have become 'personae non gratae' with all but their right wing Conservative colleagues. Most Tories deeply resent how, again and again, the Ulster Government has manoeuvred the British Home Office into supporting Greek Colonel types of situations in Northern Ireland.

There are indications that middle of the road Conservatives like the present Home Secretary, Mr. Reginald Maudling, wish to make changes. He has recently stated that he wants the Catholic community to have "an active, permanent and guaranteed role in the life and public affairs of Northern Ireland".

If previous experience of British politicians is anything to go by, it will again be a case of 'too little and too late'.

If improvements do occur we do not think that even the politicians can reasonably claim that they have been made for a love of justice since Westminster allowed so many grinding injustices to go on for the past fifty years (Documentation in "The Plain Truth", 2nd Edition).
