

IRELAND

Betty Sinclair

IN face of the events of 'Bloody Sunday' in Derry the reaction has been such as to unite practically the whole Irish nation against British imperialism. After half-a-century of division, created by the Lloyd George Government in 1920, the result was to be seen in a *de facto* united Ireland in rain- and wind-swept Derry on Tuesday, February 2, when the 13 victims of the British paratroops were laid to rest. Instead of turning the anti-Unionists of the North from their struggle to win democratic rights with which to determine their own future, the punitive attack only succeeded in rousing the whole of the Irish people in the 26 counties, from Donegal to Cork and Waterford. The Civil Rights march, which preceded the meeting, was illegal. All who participated, some 15,000, knew and understood this. They were willing to accept the punishment: a six months mandatory sentence under the Public Order Act.

The swift reaction of the whole of the Irish people in the 26 counties broke through the veneer of 'good relations' between the Lynch and Heath Governments, a few short weeks after their joint signing of the Treaty of Accession in Brussels, and indicating their determination, together, to join the European Economic Community. Lynch was forced to take action. The Irish Ambassador was withdrawn from London. The Minister for External Affairs, Dr Hillery, was sent to the United Nations to consult with the Secretary General and to secure the help of all friendly nations to end the actions of British troops in Ireland and promote a political solution. Dr Hillery was forced to use much stronger language in New York than he had done when he went there in 1969, following the August pogrom in Belfast. At a press conference in New York, he stated: 'I believe the British Government has gone mad.' He accused that Government of waging war on a population, and 'treating *its own citizens* as one would treat an enemy with which one was at war' (February 2, 1972).

The British Government reacted by defending the actions of their troops. One would expect no less when one knows that the troops were acting under orders from that Government to save their puppet regime in Northern Ireland, and its head, Brian Faulkner. Heath, since June 1970 when he became Tory Prime Minister, has acceded to all Faulkner's demands for more repressive measures, physical and legal. Heath and Faulkner have become the men of

'physical force'. They want a military solution, and do not care how many British soldiers or Northern Irish men and women fall in the accomplishment of that foul aim. It is no accident that, since August 1969, 233 persons have been killed, including personnel of the British Army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Reserve, and the ordinary civilian population. It is no accident that the law which has been used to validate most of these deaths is the Special Powers Act. The sad history is that the above total of dead is one more than the number who died in Northern Ireland in 1922, when the Special Powers Act was passed 'to restore law and order and give the new Parliament of Northern Ireland an opportunity to function in conditions of stability.' Needless to say, the new Parliament has never been very stable: the Special Powers Act became a permanent law and is the law which the British troops are acting under to arrest, detain, intern, carry out punitive house searches, use CS gas and water cannon, rubber bullets, and now the real thing—called for by many ultra-Unionists—lead bullets. The anti-Unionist forces, in their early months, called for British justice and British democratic rights. Now they have both, in the centuries-old British style of coercion, in that part of Ireland which remains within the orbit of British imperialism.

The British Government, in the clamour which followed the killings, decided to set up a Tribunal of Inquiry. The people of Derry and the whole of Ireland asked for an international tribunal. Maudling announced that he would set up a one-man tribunal, and named Lord Chief Justice Widgery, a man who has seen service in the British Army, who ended up as a Brigadier and was also connected, after the war, with the Territorial Army. The people of Derry and public representatives have already made it known that they will not participate in such an inquiry, composed of a single British representative, long associated with British military forces, and part of the establishment and a Privy Councillor to boot.

These suspicions have been reinforced by the statements made by the Lords Balniel and Carrington, which have already exonerated the British paratroops, and which were calculated to arouse the whole of the British people against the anti-Unionist forces in Northern Ireland. Conor Brady, a correspondent of the *Irish Times* in London, took a survey of London opinion after the Derry killings. One woman, about 40, a bank employee, is reported as saying: 'I don't understand what the Irish are all about. Do you? I think the RAF should bomb Dublin a bit and that would sort out Lynch and his IRA friends. The Army are there to stop the Irish

from shooting each other. If the Army were shot at first then they acted perfectly legally' (February 2, 1972). The old imperial spirit dies hard, and it is this that Heath and the Conservative Government depend upon to allow them to carry out their reactionary policies and actions against the anti-Unionist forces in Northern Ireland.

Heath and Co are using the genuine affection that the British people have for the men in the Army, and their personal love for members of their families who are part of the armed forces. But the British people will have to learn that Heath and Co are not one whit concerned how many soldiers lose their lives in defence of Conservative-Unionist interests.

The British press (with a few honourable exceptions, including the *Morning Star*) has adopted the attitude of 'our Army right or wrong—but right.' Leading, as always, is the *Daily Telegraph*, which has not read any history since the days of Palmerston, and certainly not since the second world war: for the *Telegraph*, the Heath Government cannot be bloody enough. Following up, in the usual way with its 'liberal' opinion, is the *Guardian* and its writer Harold Jackson. Jackson and the *Guardian*, in the first days of campaigning for civil rights, always sought to report the actions of left-wing adventurists in Northern Ireland, whose main contributions to the struggle were to split and divide the forces and help the growth of sectarianism. Now Jackson tells us that, if there had been no march in Derry on January 30, 13 people would have been alive today. 'No-one,' he writes, 'could say that there were not enough warnings that the . . . parade would end in trouble' (January 2, 1972). As well tell the British people that they were wrong to fight Hitler fascism; if they had not done so, then lives would not have been lost.

The anti-Unionist forces in Northern Ireland face a most reactionary regime, upheld by laws that would disgrace any democratic country, by armed forces equipped with all that is necessary for the conduct of a war against a hated enemy, and which has attempted to deprive them of all forms of democratic expression. In the process, it has made prisoners of the 'million Protestants' they threaten the British Government with, if that Government does not 'make the croppies lie down'.

Mr Harold Wilson and his right-wing Shadow Cabinet have called for a 'united Ireland solution'. But, in the meantime, they have refused to 'judge the actions of the troops' until the inquiry is held and brings forth its report. Wilson has demanded that res-

possibility for security be taken out of the hands of Stormont and transferred to Westminster. Are there any such foolish people who believe that British armed forces, some 15,000-strong, have been allowed to come under the jurisdiction of Stormont? Both Wilson and Callaghan know that when the extra troops came in, in August 1969, they were controlled by the Wilson Government; in fact the GOC was put in complete charge of all security forces, both British and Northern Irish. Is it to be assumed that Heath, Carrington and Balniel have not retained that control? No government, much less a British Tory Government, would ever dream of allowing its armed forces to be controlled by any other government, and especially not the rump government at Stormont.

Wilson has refused to realise that, since the new situation which has arisen since 'Bloody Sunday' in Derry, the anti-Unionist forces will not accept 'protection' from Westminster. They realise that the long-threatened 'Protestant backlash' has found its reality in the backlash from Downing Street and Stormont Castle—with the British armed forces playing the main role. Much has been said about the 'restraint practised' by the Unionist forces. Why should they not be 'restrained', when they have a well-armed force to do their dirty work?

As one writes all eyes are on the town of Newry in Co Down, where a Civil Rights march is planned for Sunday, February 6. Dire warnings have been issued about the consequences if the march takes place; all people are called upon by Stormont to 'respect the law', and are informed that the law 'will be maintained and enforced'. But the demand is going up to continue the struggle for democratic rights, for the withdrawal of the paratroops, the pulling out of the military from anti-Unionist areas, and subsequently the complete withdrawal of all armed forces. The forces of progress want the repeal of the Special Powers Act and the passing of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland at Westminster. They have called for the release of the internees and political prisoners, a guarantee of rights for all political groups to work peacefully for the attainment of their political objectives, the extension of the British Race Relations Act to cover Northern Ireland, and a guarantee of fairer electoral systems under proportional representation.

The demands emanating from the North are being matched by the developing campaign in the South. Peace and normal political conditions will not come to the Irish people, Catholic and Protestant, until the country is united, and until British imperialism's writ is completely expelled from the country. The detestation of that writ

brought down Lord Nelson's statue from its pillar in O'Connell Street in Dublin in 1966, when Ireland commemorated the Golden Jubilee of 1916. That writ was also responsible for the burning down of the British Embassy in Dublin on February 2, by over 25,000 determined workers and students of that city. Oppression never brings friendship or gratitude. When that oppression is applied to the people of another country, their righteous anger is indeed formidable.

The Unionists of the North, in their locked and barred Parliament at Stormont, see the writing on the wall, and are coming together to maintain their right to keep the Irish people divided for another half-century. Faulkner, after a 'tough' speech, got his first cheer from the Unionist garrison—Paisleyites and all. They misjudge the history and the times. They misjudge the strength of the wrath of an outraged people. And they are prepared, as has been often threatened, to bring the whole of Northern Ireland down in chaos, before they submit. To help prevent such a calamity will be a major task of the British people. They must, in a way they have never done before, press their Government to see that justice is done at long last. Otherwise, they, the British people, will become accomplices of reaction and will have set the scene for the destruction of their own democratic rights (already the miners are tasting a little of 'British justice' in their struggle for higher wages), which will leave them helpless before the present onslaught of Tory reaction.

The Irish people will fight on. They know now what they face. They will never forget 'Bloody Sunday', and will never forgive those responsible. Someday, in the near future, there will come to their aid new pens of the calibre of Sean O'Casey and J. M. Synge, who will write of that awful carnage, and of the words of the mother of Michael Kelly who strove to get near the coffin of her son as he was taken on his last journey from the church of St Mary's on top of Creggan Hill, overlooking the Bogside: 'Let me see you again. I love you Michael. Don't take him from me. I want to see him buried.' All Ireland has mourned. But all Ireland will some day rejoice.

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