

This is the frank autobiography of a major twentieth century revolutionary leader – until recently Chief of Staff of the Provisional Irish Republican Army. It is also a detailed account of the current 'troubles' in Northern Ireland as seen and experienced by one of the principal figures involved in the tragedy. It is, again, a history of the IRA and the Irish republican movement over a quarter of a century.

Seán MacStiofáin has been in the forefront of IRA policy making – first as the organization's Chief of Intelligence and later as its Chief of Staff. It was his responsibility to interpret British policy and to formulate the strategy of his movement.

Many have regarded him as a terrorist; others have seen him as a fanatic motivated solely by a thirst for destruction. He, however, regards his twenty-five years in the republican movement as twenty-five years of hard work for the cause in which he deeply believes.

Few revolutionary leaders in this century have recorded precise, detailed accounts of the manner in which their movements were organized and policy decided. Fewer still have revealed how operations were planned and their personal relations with friends and enemies, with their wives and children.

MacStiofáin's guerrilla activities have stemmed from his own interpretation of Irish history and his conviction that Northern Ireland is 'occupied' territory. Here is his explanation of what he has done and why he did it.

No reader can fail to learn from this controversial book – whatever his or her own opinion of 'The Irish Question'.

Seán MacStiofáin, born in east London in 1928, joined the IRA in 1949. He had previously completed his national service in the Royal Air Force, and had become increasingly involved in Irish politics. Arrested during an IRA arms raid in 1952, he spent six years in Wormwood Scrubs prison and, on his release, went to Ireland where he dedicated himself to the republican movement. He was elected to the IRA leadership in 1964, and played an important role until the Provisional IRA broke away. He served as 'Chief of Staff' of the 'Provos' until his arrest and imprisonment by the Irish authorities in 1972. His hunger and thirst strike while serving his sentence attracted world-wide attention.

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WITHDRAWN

Revolutionary in Ireland

Seán
MacStiofáin

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To revolutionaries everywhere,
especially to their womenfolk
who share all their hardships

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Foreword

A great deal has been written about me by journalists from all over the world, most of whom have never met me, much less interviewed me. A great deal written has been, to say the least, inaccurate and uncomplimentary. Some of it has been just "black" propaganda or character assassination by the British. More has been written in ignorance by foreign journalists unable to check their facts. But the result has been an image of me as a hard-hearted brute unconcerned with loss of human life or the sufferings of the people, a kind of moron obsessed with the use of violence, and a power-crazy maniac determined to maintain his position at all costs.

Now, it is true that while in leadership I was firm and strong-willed. But no revolutionary leader can be otherwise if his movement is to make progress. As the world knows, the Provisional Republican movement made fantastic progress from its humble beginning in December 1969 until my arrest three years later. The loss of human life has always grieved me. I was always conscious that every person killed — combatant or not, and no matter who was responsible — was somebody's son or daughter, somebody's husband or father or mother or wife. Every person killed meant enormous suffering and loss to a family on one side or another, and everything possible was always done to avoid civilian casualties. No war can be fought without casualties. The entire Republican movement, both rank and file and leadership, did their utmost to confine casualties to combatants. In spite of all the precautions civilians were accidentally killed by the IRA, and we regretted each one of them. But these fatal casualties were only a small proportion of the total civilian deaths. And the British government, as the aggressor in Ireland, is morally

and inescapably responsible for all loss of life and bloodshed in this Irish conflict as in previous ones.

As for my alleged power lust, it is a fact that I have always been prepared to serve in any position in which I was needed. If at any time during my period in leadership someone better qualified had become available, I would have stepped down, and it would have been my duty to do so.

Leading members of revolutionary movements have to be prepared for character assassination just as much as for actual physical assassination. Both weapons are parts of the stock-in-trade of counter-revolutionary agencies. Character assassination was extensively used against me from 1971 to 1973, while the self-acknowledged former British agent Kenneth Littlejohn has repeatedly stated that he was instructed to kill me. But I have survived to tell my story, my side of events, of how and why I joined the Republican movement. I hope that in doing so I shall have cleared up a lot of the fiction about myself.

I joined the Irish revolutionary movement at the age of twenty-one. For twenty-four years I remained an active member, thinking, working, organising from week to week, day in and day out. All my spare time (and a good deal of my employers' time) went into the movement. It was in fact my entire life. I joined this movement through conviction, the conviction that the only way to free the country I love so much, and the people I admire so much, was by force of arms. I remained in the movement for twenty-four years, the best years of my life, because I never lost that conviction or the sense of purpose which every dedicated revolutionary must have if he or she is to face up to the long, uphill struggle.

I still believe that revolutionary violence is the only way for an oppressed people to win their freedom. Great nations as well as small ones owe their existence to it. Who thinks that the people of Mozambique or Angola could overthrow the Portuguese colonial system by debate? Or that the blacks of Rhodesia will defeat Ian Smith's racialists by constitutional means? For these and for all such imprisoned, exploited peoples, there is no reliable route to freedom other than the armed struggle.

But in advocating it, I am not motivated by either sectarian or racist views. I believe that the English people themselves will one day have to use violence to overthrow the system that has brought so much suffering to so many for so long. It is evident that the

counter-revolutionary elements in society believe it too. It is no secret that Brigadier Kitson and others in the British army now envisage its future role as "restoring the situation" if social unrest should occur among its own population. If that day comes, Irish Republicans will be the very first to step forward to help their fellow revolutionaries.

Like all Republicans, I long for the day when Ulster Protestants will take their rightful and proper place in a new all-Ireland community. Like all Republicans, I stand by the Proclamation of 1916 and its guarantees of religious and civil liberties, equal rights and equal opportunities for all. I am aware that very many Ulster Protestants regard me as a Catholic bigot; yet I am on record as stating that I have much more disagreement with the Irish Catholic bishops than have the Protestants themselves. There is an allegation in Maria McGuire's book that on hearing of the deaths of some civilians in Belfast I commented, "What does it matter if Protestants are killed — they are all bigots, aren't they?" No doubt that allegation did me untold harm among Protestants in the North — and no wonder! Miss McGuire invented that "comment" expressly to discredit me, and through me the movement.

In the new Ireland towards which Republicans strive, new political and economic structures will be needed to return the ownership of Ireland to the Irish people. New social attitudes in keeping with our common Christian heritage will have to be formed to mould the new society which is needed to eradicate snobbery, class consciousness, sectarian bigotry and similar forms of prejudice.

But it is the various sections of the Irish people themselves who must reach agreement on the future of their country. British political "initiatives" have only produced Irish disasters. Republicans have always recognised this. Progressive Unionists are beginning to recognise it. Obviously, lasting peace in Ireland can only come from Irish political initiatives.

The only way to achieve this is a conference of all Irish organisations involved in the Northern situation. Meaningful Protestant participation is essential. All shades of opinion must be represented, revolutionary and reformist, radical, pacifist and militant. The alternative is years more of continuing revolutionary and counter-revolutionary violence. The IRA cannot be suppressed. Neither can the UVF—UDA. All these organisations have too much grass-roots support to be defeated. The IRA in particular has repeatedly

demonstrated that, despite manpower losses over five years of revolutionary war, it can escalate its military operations at will. And while it retains that capacity it cannot be beaten, no matter what new tactics are used against it, or what new weapons are introduced.

But if revolutionary warfare has to continue because no British-imposed formula can produce a just solution, the suffering of the Northern people will be protracted. It is to end this suffering for all time that the greatest effort must now be made to convene an all-Irish conference and arrive at a realistic settlement.

Such an agreed Irish solution would leave the British with no alternative but to declare their intention to withdraw their troops by a specific date. Public guarantees of religious and civil liberties would be made to the Ulster Protestants. These could be registered with the United Nations, and The Hague, and with other international bodies.

It is time now for interference, whether military or political, to cease while the Irish people come together to arrange their own destiny. The state policy of a bygone England was to divide them. It is the ruins of that policy which have caused the war in the North. But modern England must not seek to correct her long mistake by trying to redesign Ireland afresh, or to demand any part in that redesigning. The Irish people can afford no more incompetent foreign experiments with their own country. As soon as the British acknowledge that and depart in peace, our countries will be happier places to live in.

Chapter I

In the Dock

Three Irish revolutionaries stood in the dock of an English court, awaiting sentence. To the spectators on that early October day in 1953, the case was in puzzling contrast to the routine legal events of the Hertfordshire assizes. But it was a scene foreshadowed thousands of times before and repeated hundreds of times since in Ireland's long revolutionary struggle to recover her freedom and national sovereignty.

If you put the backgrounds of the three of us together, a Republican paper observed that year, they represented a composite of the Irish race. Manus Canning came from Derry in the occupied North. Cathal Goulding, a stocky Dubliner, was from the unoccupied, neo-colonial South. And I, the youngest, was part of the Irish diaspora. I had been born abroad but looked to Ireland as my spiritual home in the way that millions of Jews had looked to Palestine.

It seemed we would not take up much of Mr Justice Streatfeild's time. Our trial had begun the previous morning and was now almost over. Without retiring, the jury found us guilty in a record ninety seconds by the simple procedure of turning to each other and nodding their heads. Nevertheless the heavy British ritual had to be played out. The foreman stood up and bowed to the judge. The clerk of the court asked if they had reached a verdict. The foreman, as though the clerk did not exist, looked stiffly at the judge. "We have, my lord."

"How find you, then?" asked the clerk. The strange, pompous ring of the question annoyed me. Get on with it, I thought.

"On the first charge, guilty," the foreman replied. "On the second charge, guilty. On the third charge, guilty."

All eyes went back to the judge. Had we anything to say?

Manus Canning spoke up. "My comrade Cathal Goulding will make a statement on behalf of us all. I wish to associate myself with that statement."

"What?" The upper-class voice was not enthusiastic. "I see. Very well, Goulding."

Cathal took a half-step forward and said clearly in his strong Dublin accent, "We believe that only by force of arms can Ireland achieve her complete freedom. It was to this end that we took our action. We have no apologies to offer. Our only regret is that we failed to place those weapons in the hands of our comrades-in-arms in Ireland." He stepped back alongside us, speech over.

Sir Geoffrey Streatfeild looked down at us in surprise. It was my turn.

I said quickly, "I'm Irish by blood, descent and deliberate choice." More slowly I added, "I am proud to associate myself with the remarks of my comrade Cathal Goulding."

The judge scowled. He was accustomed to the usual bag of tricks, the lies and hard-luck stories which the professional criminal pulls out at this stage in the hope of a lighter sentence. But we had not even contested the evidence. And by taking this defiant stand at the end, we were obviously upsetting the way he liked things done.

"I am very sorry to hear those remarks," he said, "for I have no alternative now but to sentence you to severe terms of imprisonment." He went on, becoming more forceful about it, "Throughout these entire proceedings, not one of you has shown a single spark of remorse. I am going to treat you all alike. I see no reason whatever why I should differentiate between you."

His voice went up sharply. "The sentence of this court is that you will be confined in prison for eight years on the first charge, eight years on the second charge, and five years on the last charge."

He paused. I was counting rapidly. "The sentences to run . . ." — Streatfeild paused again for what felt an unbelievably long moment — ". . . concurrently."

Three very relieved revolutionaries were speedily ushered out of the dock and down to a cell underneath the courthouse. If that judge had said "consecutively" instead, we would have been facing sentences of twenty-one years each. Even with maximum remission it would have meant a solid fourteen years behind bars in England.

That could have made quite a difference to later developments in Ireland — and certainly a hell of a difference to ourselves.

In London four months earlier, while the British were settling down again after the expensive play-acting of the coronation, and Ireland was a long way from most of their minds, I had received certain instructions from Dublin. As commander of a small Republican unit, I was told to hire a van, have a number of strong wooden boxes made to a specific size, and rent premises suitable for storing them. Though I naturally wondered, I wasn't told what the preparations were for, and I didn't ask. In our work we adopted a system generally called the "need to know" system. For security reasons, each person was given only what details were necessary for his or her own part in an operation. When I had everything in order I reported back and waited.

A few weeks later I was told where to meet a leading member of our movement on the third Saturday in July. The rendezvous was in London, and we both kept it. Afterwards we met two other members who had travelled over from Ireland. Manus Canning belonged to the Derry unit of the IRA. I had known him briefly a couple of years earlier when he worked in London. Cathal Goulding I had heard of, but this was the first time our activities had brought us together. He was a painter, and a third-generation Irish revolutionary.

At a further meeting later that night, I got confirmation of what I had already guessed. There was to be an arms raid not far from London. Better, I had been selected to take part in it with Cathal and Manus.

The target was the officers' training corps armoury of Felsted School in Essex. From advance intelligence we knew there would be no sentries guarding it, so no personal weapons were to be carried.

We left the city late at night in the red van I had hired, mingling with light weekend traffic heading home after an evening out in the West End. Felsted is about thirty miles out of London, to the northeast of Epping Forest in country criss-crossed by small rivers and brooks. I had already studied the roads and we reached the target area without difficulty.

The armoury was right by the side of the road quite a way from the main school buildings and dormitories. We got in through the window with no trouble at all and found ourselves standing in an

arsenal bulging with stuff. Nearly every British public school saw itself as a little officer factory and had a surprising quota of war equipment for its OTC. Here under our noses were the trappings of establishment violence, provided for the young gentlemen of Felsted to rehearse on. It was a pleasure to sort through that material and pick out only the very best. We took our time, and we had to leave at least a hundred rifles behind for lack of room.

When we were ready to take off we had a medium machine-gun, eight Bren light machine-guns, and a dozen Stens. We found a PIAT anti-tank projector, a trench mortar and dummy training bombs for it, and no fewer than a hundred and nine Mark IV .303s, at that time the most modern rifle in use in the British army. Those cadets certainly weren't fooling around with wooden guns. There was no live ammunition, though. That was kept somewhere else.

We brought the van up quietly, loaded our haul into it, and shoved it about a hundred yards or so. With a push-start we got away smoothly, driving off down the deserted road in the calm, still night. The target itself had been dead soft. So far, so good.

Eleven miles clear of Felsted, we came to Bishop's Stortford, a country town where route A11, the main Cambridge road, runs due south to London. We were talking as we went through the outskirts.

"What time do you think we'll get to the dump?" somebody asked me.

I was just working it out when we ran into a two-car police trap. The first car let us pass, then pulled out to block the road behind. The other was up ahead, sealing it off in front. It was the set-up that British police sometimes use to stop speeding drivers, for stolen vehicle checks, or simply as practice for bored patrol crews who haven't managed to book anybody all night.

Five or six policemen surrounded the van. A very young and nervous constable came over and put his head in. I knew then that being stopped was due to pure bad luck and not to a tip-off because when he spotted our mountain of stuff he nearly had a fit.

"Sergeant, sergeant," he stammered. "They have a load of rifles!"

I heard the sergeant reply from over on my side. He looked enormous and must have weighed at least two hundred and fifty pounds. "Put the handcuffs on them," he boomed. "Get them out and put the handcuffs on them."

As the handcuffs snapped on us I suddenly thought of Máire Óg,

my youngest daughter, then seven months old. Where and when would I see her again?

We were led off on foot through the darkness into Bishop's Stortford while the cars stayed with the van. They held us in the dayroom at the police station, and soon more of them arrived. They looked incredulous. The young constables were staring at each other, trying to grasp why anyone would be trundling around their sleepy parish at that hour of night with something like a hundred and thirty military weapons on board, including a mortar and a tank-stopper. But there was an old experienced policeman there, probably over a quarter of a century in the force.

He said slowly, 'I think this has political implications.'

The talk died away as the huge sergeant who had arrested us marched in. He sized us up, then said bluntly, "Well lads, where did you get them from?"

"We've nothing to say," we told him.

He grunted. "We'll soon see about that."

They took Goulding out to another office, but in about half a minute he was back again, followed by a character in plain clothes. This one was a detective sergeant.

"Huh," he sneered. "Soldiers of the Irish Republican Army."

The young policemen looked impressed at this, as though he had solved the case already. But Goulding had simply told him when he asked the first question, "We're members of the IRA. We don't make statements when we're captured."

They took us downstairs to separate cells. "You're not to go to bed," they warned us. When they returned one of them said, "Hand us your clothes. We're searching you."

I was carrying nothing for them to find. After they had finished turning all my gear inside out, I said I wanted to go to the toilet. I bolted the door in the usual way, but when I tried to come out the bolt jammed. The policeman outside got very excited and started pounding on the door, trying to free it. I stood in there, for a change seeing the funny side of things that troublesome night.

Eventually the bolt gave and I came out. The policeman was furious. "You're in prison now," he said, glaring at me. "When you go to the toilet you don't close the door." I wondered why they had bolts.

He locked me in the cell again. I sat down on the bed and

considered how we had got there. Every operation carries its own risks, and you always have to trade off one set of factors against another. Saturday night had been a good choice because there was nobody around the armoury, but a bad one because traffic was much lighter. Ideally it would have been better to mount the raid later in the year so that we would have had the cover of darkness in the early evening. But against that was the movement's desperate need for arms at that period, and Felsted had been an opportunity which HQ had decided to tackle when it presented itself. The risks had to be accepted. In any case, orders were orders.

I settled myself for my first night in jail. It was only too plain that there were a great many more ahead of me.

Next day we were taken upstairs to the office, again one by one. We had to leave our shoes in our cells and go in our stockinged feet. A man without shoes is regarded as less likely to escape, but the idea is also to make him feel vulnerable and inferior to his interrogators. Some military intelligence interrogators also do it to confuse him. They will break off a line of questioning and suddenly ask, "Where are your boots?" They may do this several times during the session, even though he has answered them already. I can't say I felt very vulnerable padding around in my socks on a warm Sunday morning in July. If anything, it was relaxing.

There were two plain clothes men in the office. One was the detective sergeant from last night. He introduced the other as the detective inspector who would be in charge of our case.

"Well, son," said the inspector, as if he planned to wrap it all up in ten minutes and get home to his lunch, "where did you get the weapons from?"

If they still didn't know that, the Felsted cadets must not have noticed their losses yet. Those cadets would make damn fine officers when they got into the army.

I gave them the same answer. "I've nothing whatever to say." The only information I had given since my arrest was my name.

"You haven't given us your address," the inspector said. No, and I wasn't going to.

"We'll find it out. By the way, I notice you haven't got an Irish accent. You must have been born over here?"

"Correct," I said and left it at that.

A policewoman brought in two cups of tea and the detective

sergeant was called out. The inspector picked up his and nodded at the second cup. "You take that."

I had drunk half of it when the sergeant rejoined us. "Seán here has taken your tea," the inspector said with an innocent air.

The sergeant shot me a nasty look and went back to the canteen to get himself another. I never quite made up my mind whether the inspector really enjoyed needling him or whether they were working what is known as the "Mutt and Jeff" partnership for my benefit. But from then on, whenever they interrogated me the inspector was the decent cop and the sergeant the hard cop. If the sergeant hadn't taken a genuine dislike to me after the tea episode, he must have been a marvellous actor. Finally they stopped asking questions and put us back in our cells.

The three of us found we could talk to each other through the spyholes in the doors. "Listen", said Manus to me, "do you know any Irish?"

Very little, I said, but I was keen to learn the language.

"Well, there's one bit you'd better learn straight away."

He made me repeat it until I had it. My cell was nearest the gate the policemen passed through when they came down periodically to have a look at us. Whenever I heard one of them approaching I was to call out, "Bí cúramach." It means "Be careful". That was the first bit of Irish that I added to my vocabulary in prison, and it was soon put to practical use. But I didn't use it much that day. We were all so tired from being up the night before that we dropped off and spent most of Sunday sleeping.

On Monday we were brought before the magistrate's court at Bishop's Stortford. As we filed into the dock our names were called out.

"Annso," replied Goulding in the easygoing Southern fashion. "Annseo," said Manus, the way they do in the North, and I did the same.

"What are they saying?" the magistrate demanded impatiently.

The inspector growled at us to translate. Goulding told him it was Irish for "here" or "present".

"Oh," he said, relieved. "That's all right, then. We thought you were swearing at the magistrate."

One of the English papers next day had a headline: "ANNSEO" THEY ANSWERED. It goes to show that there are endless ways of

reminding people that Ireland continues to be a nation in her own right with a distinctive language and culture. And once people understand that, it is easier to understand why she continues to be worth fighting for.

That opening appearance in court didn't take long. The three of us were remanded in custody, which meant transfer to Brixton Prison.

Inside the station wagon taking us to Brixton we were guarded by four policemen, and with our escort of cars we amounted to a proper convoy. Two of the cars were Special Branch. The other two were ordinary police cars with uniformed crews.

Our first impression of Brixton was long corridors. We tramped down them to the reception block. Immediately we met a prison officer who said to us, "I knew the IRA prisoners who were here in 1939 and right through the 'forties. Do you know any of them?"

"I knew all of them," Goulding said.

We were often asked such questions during our time in captivity.

We were given a bath. The arrangements were scruffy.

"Have you been sleeping around rough, lads?" another prison officer inquired.

"Eh?" A lot of these jail questions seemed to be in a peculiar kind of code.

The PO spelled it out. "Have you any lice?"

Goulding had been inside for a few spells elsewhere. He gave him a cool "No." My denial was more indignant. The PO looked a bit dubious, but he didn't send our clothes off to be ruined in the fumigator. They took us back to the prison block. Doors banged again, and we were locked in for the second night.

In the morning we were taken before the governor, and afterwards we were allowed out to an exercise yard. As we walked around, we found we were the centre of attraction in Brixton. The staff showed open curiosity and a number of remand prisoners tried to get into conversation with us. We avoided this. We were bound to uphold the Republican principle that a prisoner accused of a political offence is a political prisoner, regardless of what view the prison authorities may take. In our opinion, we would be compromising that political status if we were too free or friendly with criminal prisoners (or, to use a more modern and perhaps more enlightened term, social prisoners). This is not elitism, as anybody who has been a prisoner of war or a political captive knows very well. We were simply there for very different reasons. We did not build or support the environment

that had made criminals of these social prisoners. Indeed, as revolutionaries we were actively hostile to it.

But apart altogether from our movement's policy, we were personally not inclined to have much to do with them. In Brixton most of them were hardened crooks, and they were neither interesting nor pleasant company. Occasionally we would break our rule for an Irish prisoner, but some of these too you wouldn't want as friends.

On the second day in Brixton my wife Mary got in at last to see me for the first time since our arrest. We had never met before under circumstances like these. I knew the squalid, sour-smelling atmosphere of the dirty old jail must be adding to her ordeal.

"How long do you think you'll get?" She was always a girl to face matters squarely.

I had spent some time trying to reach a sensible estimate on that. At the pessimistic end of the scale were exaggerated visions of a treason charge. Not so gloomy, but depressing enough, were the forecasts of very long stretches which filtered in from our London friends. At the far end of the scale, some of our other acquaintances were painting much too rosy a picture. It would only be cruel to let Mary believe their airy talk of two or three years. I bracketed my own guesses around the half-way mark. I never believed we would get more than ten, but I couldn't see us getting less than seven. So that was what I told my wife. And, as it proved, my estimate wasn't much out.

During the eleven and a half weeks we were on remand awaiting trial we got our jail life organised very quickly. In Brixton we had a 45-minute exercise period morning and afternoon, with a half-hour visit daily. We spent the remaining 22 hours locked in our cells. It was up to you what you did in there. You could sit brooding or give in to depression. That was a dangerous state of mind to get into, and it was generally the start of the breakdown in personal morale that leads to what they call in prison "doing your bird hard."

I believed that a revolutionary in prison has no business slumping down or feeling sorry for himself. It didn't take long to see what alternatives were left. If I could escape from captivity, I would. If not, I would put every minute of my time to the best possible use, both for myself and for the movement. In that way, I would go on resisting the system.

"Jail is the only place where one gets time to read," that great

Irish woman revolutionary Constance Markievicz once said. That was all very well, but if I were to get the habit of reading everything that came my way with a cover on it I would only be killing time, not using it. There was a later freedom fighter whose advice to political prisoners hit the nail on the head. Menachem Begin, one of the most successful of the underground leaders who gained Israel her independence, said "Open your eyes wide, and *learn*."

To learn I would first have to organise. The Brixton prison library wasn't very good, but fortunately while we were on remand I could have almost any book sent in as long as it wasn't on the banned list. I worked out what I would need.

To start with, I would study the language. This would at least give me a deeper understanding of the Irish heritage, good mental discipline, and a confidential way to communicate with Goulding, Manus and others I might meet in the years ahead. Manus began giving me a daily Irish lesson. He wrote out the irregular verbs on toilet paper which he slipped to me in the yard or wherever he could. There are easier methods of learning a language, but believe it or not I made rapid progress. These sheets were all I had to help me until we began to get the books. Then the late Jimmy Steele of Belfast sent me in some excellent phrasebooks and a grammar, and after that I was really able to get down to proper study. Next, I would go on studying as much as I could about Ireland and her history, nationhood and culture. Finally, there was the question of preparing to make my living outside when I was released. I had had some experience in office management, stores and accounts, and I had always wanted to make a thorough study of accountancy. They had a reasonable book on that subject in the prison library, so I got hold of it and started to read it up, in a fairly informal way to begin with.

All through August we were taken weekly to Bishop's Stortford and remanded again until our preliminary hearing came up. At our last remand before the hearing I was in the police station cell at Bishop's Stortford. Suddenly the door of my cell swung open and the detective sergeant whose tea I had drunk came in. He was swinging an iron bar. With him was the detective inspector in charge of the case.

They said they needed a statement. I repeated that we didn't make statements. So we had to play the game of hard cop, decent cop all over again. The sergeant threw me his special dirty look and hinted that he would soon extract what they wanted if he were allowed to go to work on me with his bar.

The inspector came over to me and smiled reassuringly. "Don't get alarmed. We're not going to beat you." He showed me a photograph album. It was full of pictures of the rifles and the other hardware. He said they were going to use these pictures as evidence both at the preliminary hearing and in our trial. I felt they wouldn't have anything like the effect of the real thing in court, but that could only be to our advantage.

"Well," they said, "have you anything to say?"

I shook my head once more.

"Damn it," said the inspector, "you can't deny you stole the weapons."

"I don't regard that as stealing. It's capturing from the enemy."

The inspector tried another tack. He spoke sympathetically about Mary. He said he had been to see her and she told him she didn't approve of my activities in the Republican movement.

"I don't believe she said any such thing."

After some more argument, they called it off and went out. I think they moved to Manus and Goulding and went through much the same rigmarole. They didn't bother us again.

The preliminary hearing didn't take long. As each witness finished we said, "No questions." If we had contested the evidence the proceedings might have gone on for days. But this was exactly what we didn't want. So in two or three hours the hearing was over, and we were formally committed for trial at the autumn assizes.

When the day of our trial came we were taken to cells below the courthouse. Suddenly I heard the sound of trumpets on the air of the autumn morning. We asked a PO what was going on. He told us that a pair of trumpeters always played a salute for the judge on the opening of the county assizes, and when he entered or left the building. From all the ceremonial you would have thought some Roman emperor was arriving. But it was only Sir Geoffrey Streatfeild coming to deal with the local burglars and to settle England's account with us.

When it was all over and we had been taken down again to begin our sentences Manus said, "Well, eight years isn't that long. It could have been a lot worse."

"That's right," Goulding said. "The crowd in Dublin had us written off for twelve."

Our big hope was that the three of us would be sent to the same prison. This is something very important to political prisoners. Even

the longest stretch is more bearable if you are with people who understand and share your basic beliefs, and who have paid the same price for holding them.

While we were discussing all this in the cell, I heard the trumpets blaring again on the steps above our heads. They sounded like a parting military salute.

“Be ready to move when you finish that,” a prison officer said, handing us a mug of tea and a meat sandwich apiece. More POs and a number of policemen came into the cell. Canning and I were handcuffed together. They put a separate pair on Cathal. We knew then that he was going to one jail, Manus and I to another. The warders were very formal. With the police there, they wouldn’t talk to us more than they had to.

We left in a large car with two POs. Two Special Branch cars travelled with us, boxing us in ahead and behind. We sped into London using back roads and avoiding expectable routes. Once we entered the city, the cars went through an area I would have known blindfolded. We were in Holloway and Islington not far from where I had grown up.

The convoy turned off a long road and halted. So it was to be Pentonville, that grim and ugly prison with all its links with past Irish revolutionaries. It had been built by a scared government facing the million followers of the Chartist leader Feargus O’Connor, social revolutionary of Kerry stock. O’Donovan Rossa, Tom Clarke and other Fenians had been held there. And there too Roger Casement had been officially murdered in the hangman’s shed. I remembered passing Pentonville one morning during the War and seeing a crowd outside. Somebody else was being hanged. I was told he was a German spy. But which of us was marked for Pentonville now?

“Get out,” they said to Cathal.

One of the saddest memories of my life will always be the sight of Cathal Goulding standing there at the entrance to the prison reception block, waving goodbye to us with his two hands manacled together. Manus and I sat silent and depressed. As the car moved away, I began to ponder the chances of breaking out of Pentonville. I knew if I could have managed it myself I would have been in a safe house in that area inside a few minutes. A nudge from one of the warders broke into my thoughts.

“Hey,” he said. “Do you see that?”

There was a sign painted on the outside of the prison wall. *Roger Casement Died for Ireland 3.8.1916.*

"Yes," I answered. "It's been there for a couple of years."

What I didn't tell him was that I had painted it myself on a hot August night in 1951. I did it to mark the anniversary of Casement's execution and to stir up pressure for the transfer of his remains to Ireland. Too many Irish people had forgotten that he still lay in an unmarked grave in the prison yard. There had been some publicity about that sign at the time, and they obviously hadn't been able to get it off.

One of the POs escorting us in the car was a Cockney and quite friendly. The other was a Welshman, with the guilty Celtic conscience of so many Celts who do the work of the English.

We went through Camden Town and Regent's Park. The leaves were coming off the trees, and winter was not far off. Near a Tube station I caught sight of big black words on an evening newspaper bill. *IRA Men Get Eight Years*.

"You can thank your mate Goulding you got eight years," the Welshman said.

"How do you mean?" I asked.

"If he'd kept his mouth shut instead of making that statement you'd have got off with five," he said maliciously.

If that was his game, the Welshman could go to hell. I told him coldly we all knew Cathal was going to make his statement. What was more, we had all agreed with it beforehand and had associated ourselves with it in court. Seeing he wasn't going to get far in turning us against one another, the man dropped the subject.

Instead he had a go at me. If I was born in England, he said, I had no business getting mixed up with Republicanism. My wife and family should be my problems, not Ireland.

This comment developed into a red-hot political argument, with Manus and myself against the Welshman, and the Cockney enjoying it all from the sidelines. We were at it hammer and tongs when I felt the car slowing down.

We had reached our stop. Wormwood Scrubs Prison.

The Welshman stopped arguing and did his best to recover a sense of authority.

"Knock off the talk now," he ordered. Since he'd been doing most of it himself, that seemed to amuse the Cockney more than ever.

"Right," he said, and beckoned us out.

They handed us over to the officer in charge at the gate.

"Two on, sir," the Welshman said. It sounded very professional jailer's jargon.

There was a big slate just inside the gate. The officer rubbed out the four-figure total chalked on it and wrote up a new one. It had increased by two.

“Good luck now,” our escorts said to us. As the gate banged, the Welshman was no longer at all hostile.

Chapter 2

Discoveries

I was born in Leytonstone in east London in 1928. When I was about three years old we moved to Islington in the northern part of the city, and that was where I grew up. My mother had been married before, and I had three half-sisters who were much older than myself. They were all nurses who lived away from home. I was the only child of her later marriage.

I was very attached to my mother. She was tall and slim, somewhat old-fashioned in her style of dressing and her ideas. She had a high-church outlook, steady and strict but never cruel. I owe what sense of discipline I have to her. She always insisted on those around her speaking the truth, and she disapproved of drinking.

My father did not share all her views. He was a solicitor's clerk, endlessly sorting out documents and making notes in the most beautiful handwriting I have ever seen. Law work consists largely of talking, and I suppose it is understandable that he and his contacts did a lot of their business in pubs. The trouble was, he had a bad head for drink and took more than was good for him. This caused tension in the house and upset my mother and gave me a distaste for heavy drinkers to this day. But my father was not a violent man. He had his good points too. One was his generosity. He would bring home toys and sweets and give me handfuls of coppers. On the whole, I was better off and far happier than a great many of the children who grew up in London during the 'thirties.

Though London did not suffer as badly as other areas in the depression, money was often tight enough among the families around Islington and Holloway and the Angel. It was a thickly populated working-class area with shops and railways and markets, and heavy

traffic always roaring out through the junctions towards the up-country trunk roads.

I was seven when my father had me baptised, and I was sent to a Roman Catholic school in Islington. Many of the children there were Irish-born or London Irish. It was with these boys that I instinctively mixed, and among them that I made my friends.

The headmaster of our school was Irish, and so were the two women teachers. There were two men teachers, one of them of Irish descent, and a number of brothers from a religious order.

My mother died in February 1939 when I was ten. I missed her badly. Brother Murphy noticed my tears and called me aside into a cloakroom.

"There's no point in crying," he said. "Your mother is dead. If crying could bring her back, then cry away. But it won't." He reached into his soutane, took out a sixpence and gave it to me.

We had no school dinners in those years. My father used to leave me a shilling a day for a midday meal, which I would eat in the nearest cafe. While the customers talked football, horses and politics over their lunches, I read.

I was fond of books almost from the time I could hold one, and I learned to read quite early and avidly. Travel books were my favourites.

During the spring and summer of 1939, after my mother's death, my reading habit developed a great deal. I spent a lot of time in the children's library, and if I had a choice of presents for Christmas or a birthday I would ask for books. It was through a disappointing version of *The Swiss Family Robinson* that I learned to my indignation that there could be more than one edition of a book, and that one was better than another. I still dreamed of travel. The Indies, the way Columbus had gone, sounded interesting and I wondered if I would ever get the chance to visit them.

In September 1939 my travels began all right, but not to anywhere I had expected. On the Friday before war was declared we were paraded in the playground with our gasmask cases over our shoulders to be evacuated from London. The whole school climbed into a train under the care of the assistant head, a strict Scots brother. We were taken to Bedfordshire and split into three groups, each group going to a different village.

Six of us were billeted in the largest house in the area. It was the Big House of the local aristocracy, with a maid, a gardener and a

chauffeur. Here I had my first clear insight into the English class system. When we asked if we could hear the news on the radio, they made us stand outside the window to listen to it.

Our classes went on in a disused building, which grew draughtier as the winter approached.

There was still no sign of any fighting between the British and the Germans, and I took a great interest in the winter war in Finland. Since then I have had a strong admiration for the Finns and their defiance of the Soviet Union, and I have studied what I could about them, including the way they succeeded in restoring their own language.

We had nowhere to hear Mass in the village, and one of the Italian lads and I distinguished ourselves by cycling fourteen miles to church on Sunday. The teaching staff must have been pressing for more realistic facilities to educate us, because after two months we were evacuated again.

The authorities could hardly have moved us much closer to Germany than the next place they sent us, the east coast of Norfolk. When we saw German planes attacking a fishing boat, a live mine being washed up near us, and a German bomber that had crash-landed on the beach, some of the school decided it would have been just as sensible to stay in London. So we were evacuated once more back inland to Warwickshire.

This time I was lucky. For the best part of two years I had a very good home in a happy household. The man of the house was a miner named Stan Hall. Stan supported the Labour Party. His wife Gladys, the daughter of a small farmer, preferred the Conservatives. I still think of their kindness to me, and if more English people were like them and those other mining families the world would be a better place to live in. Once I settled down there, I no longer missed the city much. I enjoyed being a countryman, and the freedom of long walks in the fields and lanes.

In 1942, when I was fourteen, my father sent for me to return to London. I wasn't particularly keen on going back. He had married again less than a year after my mother's death and I did not get on very well with my stepmother. I would rather have stayed in the Midlands with the Halls, who were quite prepared to keep me. But my father insisted.

He had always hoped I would become an articled clerk. I left that idea alone. Instead I started work in a light engineering factory. I

began on a drilling machine at twenty-one shillings a week. Later I got twenty-five, then a rise of five shillings every three months. I learned one kind of machine after another and eventually became a capstan lathe operator. But my life in the country had made its mark. I would have to get out of the factory into a job in the fresh air. Like many another lad, I found it in the building industry.

At that time it would be more accurate to call it the re-building industry. All over London squads of labourers were repairing the heavy damage caused by the blitz of 1940–41. I was taken on as a trainee plumber. Although they called us apprentices, we were not in fact indentured. There was a great shortage of materials, and as a result the various contractors got up to some remarkable juggling to lay their hands on them before their competitors. They didn't squander the stuff when they repaired bombed working-class homes. These were quickly patched up just enough to make them habitable. Far better jobs were done on the houses and flats we worked on in the fashionable parts of Chelsea and Kensington.

When the V-1 flying bombs started coming over, it was officially given out that there had been an explosion in a gas main. But nobody believed that for long, and soon dozens of them were falling on London every day. I helped to dig people, including a baby, out of the rubble. V-2 rockets nobody could do anything about, because you never heard them coming at all until they went off. I remember one V-2 exploding in the air over Holborn while I and others were repairing the roof of an office block, and it was a shattering experience.

Inevitably, on any building job you are bound to meet somebody Irish. In our case it was a carpenter. During the dinner break I would sit with him and the other Irish workers we met during the day, talking or listening. Though this seemed quite natural to me, it soon brought sarcastic comment from some of my English workmates.

When I was very young, not more than seven, my mother had said to me, "I'm Irish, therefore you're Irish. You're half Irish, anyway. Don't forget it."

I never did. This is the incident to which I attribute the fact that, in spite of having been born and brought up in England, I never considered myself anything but Irish. And it was by no means the only time she reminded me of her Irish connections. I can distinctly remember her greeting Irish people in London on two or three occasions.

"Hello," she would say to them, "I'm from Belfast. Where are you from?" Then they would talk about Ireland. There were some Irish connections on my father's side too, but he was vague about them, and they certainly meant nothing to him.

Some months after my mother died I remember walking with my father in Islington when he met an associate of his and they stopped to talk in the street. It was a warm summer's day and we were standing by some steps that led down from the pavement to the roadway. My mother was mentioned, and then Ireland came into their conversation. My father turned and pointed to me and said to the other man, "Well, *he's* fifty per cent Irish."

The IRA bombing campaign in England was under way, and that may have been why their talk turned in this direction. At any rate, I can clearly recall a number of similar references to my mother or myself when my father was with some of his friends or relatives. They had the effect of first arousing my curiosity about the Irish people, then leading me to seek them out and gradually develop a feeling of being at one with them.

The fact that wartime Britain drew hundreds of thousands of workers and recruits from Ireland never seemed to count when the South was condemned for its neutrality. I had already come across this in the factory, when some of the men were telling each other what ought to be done with De Valera and the rest of the Irish race.

"Hold on," I said. "My mother was Irish."

"So what?" one of them said. "*You're* not. What the bloody hell has it got to do with you?"

I was very lucky not to get a hiding from them on that and several other occasions. The general opinion was that a damn cheeky kid who had the fantastic good fortune to be born in England had no right to argue when they spoke of Irish people in this way.

The foreman plumber, whose name was Clark, liked to provoke such clashes when we knocked off for dinner. While we were working on a house in Chelsea, I discovered that he had been with the British troops who had tried to hold down Cork under martial law in the 1920s, and that he felt quite smug about it.

"It's a pity the IRA didn't get you," I told him once when I got fed up with his master-race wisecracks.

I was staggered by the vehement prejudices of labourers, bricklayers, plumbers and others around me. They usually wouldn't say anything in the presence of people they knew to be Irish. That was

why their reactions were so often surprise and anger when I put them right about where I stood. Since those experiences, I have come to believe that there is an inherent anti-Irish feeling in most English people. There is plenty of evidence that such a feeling has existed for centuries. Possibly they, and especially the working class, are unwitting victims of the propaganda and the cruel caricatures of their Irish neighbours instigated by British governments and editors since the seventeenth century. Much of this propaganda can only be described as racist, and so much of it is still on file to be read by anybody with two eyes in his head that the point is not worth arguing. The image of the Irish as a lazy, good-for-nothing and untrustworthy race has always been accompanied by the harshest oppression, which is a familiar combination in colonial history. Over such a long period, perhaps it is not surprising that so many ordinary and otherwise decent English working people have been brainwashed into accepting it. At any rate, I experienced it for myself as soon as my political ears opened as a young workman in the early 1940s, and for more than a decade afterwards.

One of the great drawbacks for anybody who wanted to learn more about Ireland was the lack of an Irish cultural centre in London. I knew nowhere I could go to find a good Irish library, nor did the men I met at work. But the Islington and Holloway public libraries turned out to have a reasonable selection on their shelves labelled *Ireland*. I built up a small collection by hunting through the secondhand bookshops in the Charing Cross Road and the open-air barrows in Farringdon Road. I studied my way through a stack of works, beginning with a good general history of Ireland. When I was nearly sixteen I carefully read a history of Sinn Féin. And somewhere or other I managed to dig up some pamphlets on James Connolly. They were heavy going for me at the time, with no one to guide or tutor me, but I read and reread them until bit by bit I could make out both the national and the social shapes of the Irish revolutionary philosophy. They seemed to point to one simple fact anybody could understand. None of the risings and revolutionary movements in Ireland had to do with any single leader seeking power for himself. All had the same objectives — justice and freedom.

Needless to say, I came across some weird and useless books as well. I remember one very peculiar volume called *Ireland: An Enemy of the Allies*. It was a black-propaganda job, but the effect it produced on me was the opposite of what the author intended. That

book opened my eyes to how officially inspired British methods were being employed in the attempt to discredit Ireland. Oddly enough, its last line provided me with the first phrase I ever knew in Irish — a most unlikely one, as it turned out: “A Dhia saor Eire agus Almáin” — God save Ireland and Germany. According to the propagandist, it was supposed to be a greeting, though I never heard anyone use it then or since. The second part of the phrase didn’t fit my sentiments at all, but “A Dhia saor Eire” did.

I made several visits back to Warwickshire to see Stan and Gladys Hall. We were glad to meet each other, but they seemed disturbed at the way my ideas were developing. When I tried to explain them once, Stan said, “But your mother was born in *Northern* Ireland, and that’s ours. So therefore you’re British.” Much as I liked them both, that was something I would never accept.

The radio brought Ireland a little closer to me. The signal wasn’t very strong but it was better after dark. From 1942 to 1944 I got the Radio Eireann programme after 10.30 almost every night, and I wouldn’t go to bed until it closed down with the *Soldier’s Song* about half an hour later.

I went to Irish dances. There were lively ones in a hall near Goodge Street underground station in the Tottenham Court Road. I liked listening to céilí music and watching the sets, but the main thing was being among the people and getting to know them. I would sit there drawing them out in conversation. Sometimes we would be interrupted by a fight breaking out in the hall between men who had had too much to drink.

“Ah, don’t bother yourself about Ireland,” was the advice I got from a few. “There’s nothing there. If there was, we wouldn’t be over here.” Cynical remarks like that puzzled me at first, until I understood the British stranglehold on the Irish economy and how you could never get real growth and employment while the profits streamed out of the country.

I still had a circle of Irish friends in London from my schooldays, and I went on making more. A family from the Irish midlands lived in Finsbury. One of the boys was a year or two older than I was, and his brother was older still, but the three of us got on exceptionally well. I was a regular visitor at their house, and it was there I first saw old IRA medals. They had been issued by the Free State to a relative of the family. I read the Irish newspapers they received with deep interest. The ambition to live in Ireland was beginning to form.

Feeling as I did, the logical thing was to move there sooner or later. I didn't want to spend the rest of my life in England.

Early in 1944 my feelings suddenly came to a head. There was a surge of speculation in the British press that the "neutral" territory of the twenty-six counties would shortly be occupied. My younger friend in Finsbury and I decided on a scheme for getting back to Ireland if that happened. There we would join the Southern army and fight.

Having got that far with our plan, I asked some of our London Irish pals if they were willing to come with us. Their reactions killed certain illusions of mine. They said they had been born in London and their parents had been earning their living in England most of their lives. If there was an invasion, or any clash between England and Ireland, their own loyalties and sympathies would be with the English.

The invasion threat passed. Though I remained friendly for some time after that with the lads who had refused to join us, my association with them gradually ended. Our lives had begun to head in quite different directions.

That was my first involvement of any kind with military matters. The next was my spell in the Royal Air Force.

Military conscription remained in force in England after the War ended. I knew that as soon as I reached the age of eighteen I would be called up, and that I would almost certainly be sent into the British army. That, for several reasons, was something I didn't want at all.

In late 1945 one of the problems of the day was whether the post-war world was going to be plain sailing again for various empires and monarchies, large and small. Churchill had promised to restore kings and queens all over the place whether the people wanted them or not, and now the British Labour Party was in power and doing the job instead. A lot of the wartime resistance movements were not going to let old colonial set-ups be reimposed on their countries, and bitter fighting had broken out again in many parts of the world. British policy had provoked some of these revolutionary uprisings, and the Attlee government was sending out British troops to try to suppress them.

If I waited to be called up by the army, I stood a very strong chance of being sent out with those counter-insurgent forces. The Greek civil war was on. I didn't see it as any of my business. I

certainly wasn't inclined to get myself caught up with British troops intervening in the interests of capitalism. Other troops were being sent to help the Dutch re-establish themselves in the East Indies against the Indonesian independence fighters. Again, I didn't fancy being ordered out to Borneo or Java to knock the local people about on behalf of Dutch imperialism. There was a serious situation developing in India, and nobody knew yet how it would go. In Palestine the Jewish resistance was fiercely fighting British occupation troops to get an independent homeland. There were several other conflicts of this kind brewing, and I wanted no part of any of them.

I decided that a few weeks before I was due for call-up, I would volunteer. This meant that I had a choice of service, and I asked for the RAF. That way I would get what I realised by then was very useful to have, which was some military training. But I would be less likely to be involved in any colonial action or repression. In the kind of underground fighting going on at the time there was very little scope for aircraft.

I was taken into the air force in November 1945 when I was seventeen. I got eight weeks of preliminary training with the rifle, the Sten gun and the handgrenade. We had a lot of square-bashing and route-marching, and then I was posted off to an administrative school to be trained as an equipment assistant or storekeeper. As soon as I qualified I was sent to a transit camp to be posted overseas.

One morning at camp when I went on parade they were looking for equipment assistants.

"Anybody want a cushy posting?" the flight sergeant called out.

My initial reaction was caution. You could walk into it that way and find yourself in Iceland. I chanced it, and asked where it was.

"Jamaica. All right?"

"Fine," I said, and he put me down for there with a number of others.

We went up by train to Glasgow. There we boarded a big Norwegian liner which had been converted into a troopship. Six of us shared a cabin and we were quite comfortable. We ate with the NCOs and the ship's crew. The food was excellent. We hadn't seen such a choice of meat, cheese and things like that for six years, because even after the War food remained scarce and heavily rationed in Britain. I felt pretty satisfied after that first meal. And here I was bound for the Caribbean.

The flight sergeant's description of my posting turned out to be not too far off the mark. In many ways Jamaica was indeed a cushy posting, a truly beautiful country with a wonderful climate. The tropical sun was hot, no doubt about it. But it was a bearable, dry kind of heat.

I was sent to Palisados, a RAF camp about fifteen miles from Kingston. It had originally been a transit point for taking in wartime West Indian recruits, kitting them out and sending them to England. After the War it more or less went into reverse, sorting out vast quantities of clothing and equipment and packing anything still serviceable for return to Britain. The defective stuff was sold off. Palisados dealt with other kinds of equipment too, and it was quite a demanding job to keep track of everything, make sense of all the complicated accounts and get them into shape. They needed trained people to replace those being demobilised, so when I got there I was put in charge of the clothing store.

The camp's total strength was eighteen: four officers, eight NCOs and six other ranks, including me. There was also a small force of temporary Jamaican labourers. We had practically no formal discipline, because Palisados was very much a job of-work. For five days a week we worked from 9 am to 4 pm and from then to midnight we were free to go out or do as we pleased, at least in theory.

Walking around Kingston in those first few weeks was a fascinating experience. To a new arrival, the biggest surprise was the variety of peoples and races in the island. No country was ever fonder of music and song which, together with the sunshine, the smiling good looks of many faces you would pass in the streets, and the bright colours of women's dresses, gave the whole place an air of gaiety. This deceived me for a while until I got around a bit more and learned what Jamaican life was really like.

I got to know Kingston, Port Royal and Spanish Town, and when I had spare time or a bit of leave I visited some of the holiday resorts on the north coast. I did a round of the Kingston night clubs to see what they were like — the Wicky-Wacky, the Silver Slipper, the Glass Bucket and the Colony Club. They consisted simply of dance floors, with tables around them, bands playing rumbas and calypsos, and the inevitable Jamaican rum. When I came to the island I didn't drink, but like most newcomers I felt I had to sample the rum. I discovered I liked it and, for a while, got very fond of it. But I didn't want to develop into a hard drinker, so I went easy on it the rest of the time I

was in Jamaica, and when I returned to England, I cut out drinking altogether.

I didn't understand why the bands played the British national anthem before the performances at the clubs. I asked a Kingston man.

"Well, they used to play it at the end," he said. "But nobody paid it any respect. Never stood up. Just walked out in droves." The change didn't seem to make much difference. I noticed that few English people, much less Jamaicans, were inclined to get up for it. I didn't, either.

The clothing store at Palisados was a huge disused hangar. When I took it over, the stores sergeant said, "I'd better introduce you to Clarence."

Clarence helped me. He was an extremely dark and very nice Jamaican civilian on the Air Ministry permanent staff in charge of the temporary labourers. That sounded a fairly good position and I thought he was well enough fixed by local standards. Clarence kept himself neat and tidy, a good sign in a storeman. But when I came to know him better I thought: God alone knows how he does it.

It took me a while to learn his real circumstances. One morning he brought me in a melon. It was a welcome refresher. While we took a rest among the bales of uniforms, I found out that Clarence was married and that he was keeping his wife, seven children and himself on what the Ministry paid him, two pounds a week.

"It's hard," he admitted. I was beginning to come across the reality underneath the tropical charm.

Before long I made friends with, not surprisingly, a girl whose family were of part-Irish extraction. A distant branch of the family, merchants with a business downtown in Kingston, had a typical colonial-style two-storey mansion in extensive grounds, and plenty of servants. Diana's own people were not so well off. They had a bungalow on another part of the estate.

A recent secondary-school graduate, she was a kind and intelligent girl, and great company. Her family were very good to me, and through them and other people I met, I got a true picture of Jamaican life and ways.

Sitting out on the verandah or on evenings out in Kingston, Diana gradually explained to me how the island was run, what you could do and what you couldn't do. At that time, the beginning of 1946, the average wage for a Jamaican adult was what Clarence was getting,

two pounds a week. A serving woman living in with a white family got fifteen shillings a week and considered herself quite well off.

There was an understood code of conduct. On no account must a servant eat in the same room as the people of the house. You never visited a black person's house, and you very seldom invited one to visit yours. White people did not buy or rent homes in areas predominantly occupied by blacks. In case that didn't cover everything, the code said you were to "conduct yourself properly" with them at all times.

I soon got the chance to test it. Some American aircraft technicians arrived in Jamaica to set up a new airline. They brought their wives out, and after living in an hotel for a while they wanted to get homes of their own. I went out with some of them looking at houses, and we found one place they liked very much. When we returned and told our white friends they looked at each other.

"Oh," they said, "whatever you do, don't take a house there. It's not for our kind."

Bad as the racism and poverty were, there were worse things in that colonial system. The prison in Kingston was very near the harbour. Every day the prison ship would cross with a working party for the quarry by the side of the Port Royal road. There were about a dozen prisoners with two warders guarding them. Each warder carried a rifle and a revolver. The quarry itself was surrounded by a high mesh fence with a barbed wire top and a padlocked gate.

I was driving a jeep past the quarry one day when I noticed that anyone going along the road could see in. I stopped and looked inside. I saw a horrible sight. For the first time I realised that these misfortunates were chained together like animals. They had to work there like that for long hours every day, breaking stones under the tropical sun. I got out and went over to the fence. I was trying to pass some cigarettes in to them when an armed warder came running over to me, shouting.

When he saw the air force jeep he quietened down a little. But he said, "If you ever do anything like that again, I'll report you."

That hellish hollow in the sun was in my mind's eye as I put the jeep in gear, and it is still there now.

"Has there ever been an uprising on the island?" I asked one night. A few of us were sitting out on the verandah talking. I got my answer from a Liverpool Welshman who had been in Jamaica for fifteen years. Up to then we had got along fairly well, though there was a

lot of the "I'm all right, Jack" attitude in his manner, and he had told me he cared nothing about Wales or its problems.

"They tried to start one back in the 'thirties," the Liverpool man said. He added loftily, "As a matter of fact, I was one of the people who put it down."

The affair was not on the scale he made out. A strike had led to a riot and then several weeks of unrest. The colonial reaction had been the standard one — a special constabulary made up from the European population was dished out Webleys and told there was no need to use kid gloves. They gave the strikers a severe time, as he seemed rather satisfied to recall.

I found out later that there had in fact been a large-scale revolt in Jamaica.

"But it was nearly a hundred years ago," Diana told me. The ex-slaves had risen in thousands, and it was nearly twenty years before the colonials could relax again.

There was another group of Jamaicans who were a legend in the island while I was there. These were the descendants of the Maroons, one of the earliest people in the place. They lived in the hilly interior, and in the past they had kept up a determined resistance that made life difficult for the British for a long, long time.

To keep the Jamaicans from making trouble during the War, the British brought in a formula known as partial self-government in 1944. One of the most interesting things about it was that there was no cabinet. Real power remained in London's hands.

If you only talked to whites and believed everything you read in the *Daily Gleaner*, the local paper, you could think that some kind of home rule actually existed. But once I knew my way around, all I read the *Gleaner* for was the cinema ads and its phrase-a-day Spanish lesson. The truth was that you could sense from the resentment in the poverty-stricken slums that the situation was ripe for a revolutionary effort. But a lot of the people's attention had been side-tracked by party politics. It was a hoax that kept them competing with each other, but getting no real benefits in return.

The word came five days after Christmas 1946. I was instructed to report to the commanding officer.

"I'm sending you back to the UK as being surplus to requirements," he said. He gave me four days to arrange my departure.

I spent them saying goodbye to everyone I had come to know in

Kingston (a surprisingly large number, as I realised trekking around them in the heat). I bought a civilian suit, shirts and other things I wouldn't be able to get in England.

For most of the first day out we sailed right up the entire length of Jamaica. I watched its coast for hours, going over in my mind the impressions the country had left on me. They were to be lasting ones. I had seen for myself, as close in as you could hope to get, how colonialism worked. I hated how the Europeans despised their fellow beings, whether blacks, Chinese or Indians. I hated how the West Indians were paid starvation-level wages while the colonial class lived in luxury they could never afford in England. I hated the discrimination which gave positions to whites with very ordinary qualifications and denied them to blacks and others who often had better ones. I hated the housing barrier that put whites into comfortable, well-ventilated homes, while it was assumed that slums and shanties were all that men like Clarence and their families were entitled to. I hated the whole system, the poverty and misery that it brought on people.

We spent the next day sailing past the coast of another long island. I leaned on the rail, studying high, very high mountains, blue and green, rugged and wooded. They would be hard mountains to take if anybody had to fight in them, and probably easy ones to hold.

The Island was Cuba, and the mountains were the Sierra Maestra. Ten years later they would be the battleground of Castro's revolution.

It was dark when the ship entered the English Channel two weeks later. I could see the smudge of the French coast. The lights on the opposite side were England.

After reporting ashore I was posted to a big RAF station in Bedfordshire. The discipline there was of a very high standard and the bull was fearsome. It was more like the regular army than the air force, the kind of thing you could expect if guardsmen had aeroplanes.

I had just over another year to do in the air force, during which time I was posted to various stations. One of them was in Gloucestershire, and there were a lot of Welsh airmen there. While I was at tea in the dining room one Saturday afternoon, Wales were playing in a rugby international which was coming over the radio. I was absolutely delighted when *Land of My Fathers* was sung by the crowd. About a dozen Welshmen in RAF uniform got up from the tables and stood to attention while their Welsh national anthem rang out.

That was the first indication I'd had that there was any national feeling left at all in Welsh people. What I felt about Ireland, these airmen obviously felt about Wales. I don't know who won that match, but I finished my meal very much heartened. It was clear confirmation that I was not alone in my sentiments.

During that last year, I went on the firing range as often as I could, both with rifle and Sten gun. At my last station I discovered they had what they called a defence course which lasted seven days. The problem was how to get on it. It would have looked suspicious if I had applied openly. Some training officer would be sure to make inquiries about an airman so close to his discharge wanting to do a refresher on firearms. But I had got to know a clerk in the adjutant's office. I asked him if he would arrange it. He agreed, and I appeared on the list for the course.

It was a fairly good course on the Lee Enfield rifle, the Sten 9mm submachine-gun and the hand grenade. You fired both weapons and threw the grenade. I completed the course four weeks before I was released from the RAF.

Some day, I said to myself, all this would be useful.

Chapter 3

Commitment

The two longest days I spent in the RAF were the first day in and the last day out. When they released me in December 1948, the demobilisation procedure seemed almost endless. I had to get up at an unearthly hour of the morning at the Lancashire release centre where I served my final day. After breakfast the paper work began. The outgoing airmen were “processed” in a big shed divided into various sections with screens all over the place. You filled up forms and answered questions in one part, then you had to move on to another section and fill up a different lot. I spent a couple of hours trying to pick myself out a decent demob suit from the collection of civilian clothes they had. Most of the stuff was drab or lumpy-looking, but eventually I found a brown tweed suit that wasn’t too bad.

It was dark before everything had been handed in and counted and signed for and I was a civilian again. I got on a train for London and arrived at Euston station late that night. I took a taxi to my father’s house. I wouldn’t stay there long. I was almost twenty-one now and I wanted to lead my own life. In the air force I had felt restricted. I have always hated having decisions of any kind made for me by others, and that was a trait that had grown stronger while I was away. It would be best if I just stayed temporarily with my father and stepmother while I made arrangements to find a place of my own.

In the meantime, I had a living to earn, and I wanted to be independent about that too, if I could. I had a few pounds demob pay to see me through for a short while, and I took a careful look around the building trade to see what the prospects were like. There

proved to be a good deal of work still required in repairing bomb damage, so I decided to set up as a self-employed tradesman doing plumbing, roofing and decoration jobs. This meant I could earn more without having to go back on somebody else's payroll on an eight-to-six basis. Though from then on there were often times when I worked twelve hours a day seven days a week, I preferred the freedom. I had always been careful with money, and I was able to begin saving.

Throughout my service in the air force I had never lost the Irish consciousness that had got me into so many arguments in my younger days, and now that I was back in civilian life it was more alive in me than ever. Gradually I returned to the conclusion that, feeling as I did about Ireland, the logical thing was to look forward to the day when I could move there to live. It was becoming a definite ambition, like my longing to be able to speak fluent Irish. I also had a third ambition. That was to play my part in the struggle to free Ireland from British domination and to help form a new society.

Sure enough, my father's Tory outlook had not changed; and when he became aware of some of my feelings towards Ireland he didn't approve of them. So after a few weeks I moved out. I found digs in Highgate, a fairly nice part of North London. I was near the Catholic church, which was handy for Sunday Mass, and near the grave of Karl Marx, too. It was odd to think of him lying there in London, so far from the countries that now called themselves Marxist. I had already tried to study his writings, but I was not the only one to find them too ponderous. Even afterwards in prison when I had more time to concentrate on them, reading Marx would still leave me weary.

Since leaving the air force, I had discovered that I had less and less in common with many of the London Irish friends I had had when I was younger. We each had our own ways to go, and we didn't share the same ideas. In Highgate I was now starting a new life. But I was not to be alone for very long.

It was pure fate that I met Mary. The night it happened, I had intended to spend the evening on my own, and so had she. It was a chilly evening at the end of 1948. I went out for a walk and was strolling along through Holloway, going over various things in my mind, when I heard lively Irish céilí music coming from somewhere. I realised I was passing the Round Tower, a pleasant Irish dance hall. I wasn't very good at reels and sets, but like young men then I

managed the ordinary ballroom dances fairly well. I thought I might as well drop in for a while.

Inside, I met a girl from Lisburn I had danced with occasionally. While we were circling around I noticed another girl. We just happened to look at each other at the same moment, and that was that. There was an instant mutual attraction between us. She was from North Cork, with a great personality and a smile you could never forget, very honest and direct but full of amusement. She had wanted to stay in and read a book that evening, but her sister had urged her to come to the dance.

We began to see each other about three times a week. Mary lived over at Hendon. When I saw her home we would take a tube train as far as Golders Green. If a late bus was still running I would catch it; otherwise quite frequently I had to hoof it back to Highgate. I knew very soon that I wanted to marry Mary, though marriage was a step I had certainly not counted on at that time.

But it would not be fair to expect her to share her life with somebody who held what might be considered dangerous political views, at least without telling her. Soon after we met, I decided to tell her how I felt about Ireland and my intention of being directly involved in the revolutionary struggle for liberation that sooner or later must come.

For her part, Mary did not want to stay in England for the rest of her life. But she did not have the same passionate interest in politics as I had. I think she was quite astonished, for instance, to hear later on that the Irish Republican Army was still in existence. However, once she knew I was sincere in these views she accepted them and the risks that went with them. And in time she came to share in both.

After she had heard me out, Mary said something that was to stick in my mind and come back to me a year later. "You know," she told me, "you mustn't expect every Irish person to be as patriotic as you are." I was so pleased at getting everything straight with her that I didn't think over that remark as deeply as I might have.

I took Mary to a Saint Patrick's Night dance in 1949. It was a great success, and one of the happiest evenings we ever had. A couple of nights later I proposed, and about eight months after we had met, Mary and I were married in a small Catholic church in North London. About twenty friends and relatives came to our wedding, and I took a couple of weeks off work for our honeymoon.

We mostly spent it setting up home in Hornsey, where we were

able to buy a terrace house on a mortgage, while my experience in the building trade came in useful in redecorating it and making it comfortable. In the first flush of housekeeping together, Mary forgot that food in England was still on rations. When she walked into a shop and asked for a pound of rashers and a dozen eggs, everyone in the shop burst out laughing.

Some of her sisters visited us and stayed from time to time. And, as my connections with the Irish national movement began to develop, that house in Hornsey became a centre and a meeting place where plans and activities were increasingly discussed.

The first Irish organisation I joined was the London branch of the Gaelic League, which was founded at the end of last century to promote the Irish language and national ideals. I began attending classes there to learn Irish. I did not make as much headway as I hoped. After all I had expected, it was a disappointment. I thought they were going to teach me what most people want from a language — the ordinary words and sentences you would use in a simple conversation — but the teacher tried to ram tables of grammar down our throats and made it all seem stale and dry instead of a living language.

Indeed, Mary was probably more helpful to me than the classes in my first early efforts to learn Irish. I would ask her the word for this or that. She would tell me, and I would remember, because it would be the word for some familiar object. I still saw a good deal of Jack, a Tipperary lad I had met in the air force. After we were discharged we kept in touch. He wasn't surprised by my account of the language class, and in time I discovered how much out-of-date teaching methods had to do with putting many people off a proper love and appreciation for their own language.

"Ná bac leis," Jack said. "Never mind. I'll teach you a few bits myself." He taught me a few everyday phrases which were more in my line. But, between one thing and another, I was becoming so busy then that I was really not in a good position to devote proper time to studying Irish, and it was only in prison later on that I managed to learn it more thoroughly.

Ironically enough, it was the extra time I was now giving to Irish political work that cut into any time I would have had available for learning the Irish language just then. It began when I first read a copy of a periodical called *United Ireland*. It was published by the Anti-Partition League, an organisation which was beginning to attract attention on both sides of the Irish Sea.

The League was not a political party, but rather a large pressure group. It had grown out of a post-war rally in the Mansion House in Dublin at which a fund of over fifty thousand pounds was raised by public subscription for the abolition of the border and for the reunification of Ireland. By 1949 it was very active in England. It held public meetings, including big outdoor ones at which politicians and other prominent people spoke against partition. Its literature was well produced and obviously cost a lot of money. But to Jack and me, it seemed that all this propaganda effort must be only half the story. The League certainly looked like some kind of front, but a front for what? Perhaps for a real revolutionary organisation.

We went along to a meeting of the Highgate branch. The chairman at the meeting was the late Seán McGrath, who had been active in the London Brigade of the IRA in the 1920–21 era and a worker since then in other Irish organisations in England. Jack and I joined this branch together.

To my amazement, within a month I was elected branch secretary. More astonishing still, within another few weeks I found myself on the London area council of the League. The reason for this meteoric promotion soon became clear. According to the records, every branch had a large list of members. But they existed only on paper. Attendance at branch meetings, where the branches in fact bothered to meet at all, was very small, and at Highgate meetings the average turnout was nine or ten. They were only too pleased when somebody was willing to take on the work.

The League members were a very mixed bunch. They included people who supported all the political parties in Ireland. We had ex-members of the IRA. There were former (and as I learned, still active) members of the Communist Party. A number of English Catholics had joined because they didn't like the discrimination against Catholics in the North of Ireland.

The editor of *United Ireland* was Bob Armstrong, a Belfast Protestant to whom I took an immediate liking, and who invited me to his home on a number of occasions. Bob had quite strong left-wing views in those days. In one issue he printed an editorial briefly reviewing the effects of colonialism in Ireland and other parts of the world, headed *Britain's black record*. At the third or fourth branch meeting I went to, one of the English Catholics got up and complained about it. I believe he was in the Knights of Columbus. He said we had no business printing literature which criticised the British. If the League paper was going to take this line he couldn't, or

wouldn't, sell it to his friends. This caused a heated discussion. I chimed in saying that the only thing wrong with the editorial was that it didn't go far enough in its condemnation of British imperialism. Bob evidently approved of my attitude, for I was introduced to another couple of Belfast Protestants. They turned out to be Communist Party members. I began to wonder if anybody in the League was quite what he seemed to be.

We held public meetings in Trafalgar Square, Hyde Park and in various parts of London where many Irish people lived. I chaired some of them on Friday nights and Sunday mornings near the Catholic church in Camden Town, where we later formed a district branch. These occasions in the spring of 1949 were the first time I ever spoke in public.

My disillusion with the League began after I noticed the reactions to Bob Armstrong's editorial. It gradually increased as I worked on the London area council. In the spring of 1949 Jack and I and some others were invited to a meeting at Victoria for which one of the politicians from Dublin came over. He was closely questioned by some of the most active members. One told him that doubt was arising whether the Dublin government and politicians were sincerely pressing for an end to partition.

I was far from impressed by his replies, which struck me as evasive. The cat was beginning to slip out of the bag. After the meeting, some of us took a more suspicious look at the League's operations. Why was it that the organisation had no real leadership, no initiative, no plans or funds for expansion? It had started with a considerable amount of money, but it had all gone in only one direction, on propaganda.

At one of the first meetings of the London area council that I attended, questions were asked about the expenditure of the Mansion House fund of fifty-four thousand pounds. The activists in London and elsewhere wanted to see the money spent in such a way that it would produce more solid results than public meetings. It later transpired that some of the fund had been used to finance Nationalist candidates contesting elections for Stormont. In other words, money that people had subscribed to fight partition was being made available to bolster up the partitionist parliamentary system in the North.

A lot of the League propaganda was directed against the repressive Special Powers Act in the North. It came as a shock to me to learn

that the Offences Against the State Act in the South was just as bad, and indeed in some cases it was and still is more severe.

It took a while to unravel the whole clever game, but finally I was in no doubt. The League was quite hollow, and the anti-partition campaign was simply political eyewash. The Dublin government was disturbed by the idea of large sums like this being raised for an independent movement that was agitating for the border to be abolished. It manoeuvred secretly to get control of the League through its own nominees and those of the political parties, then made sure all the money was spent harmlessly on propaganda instead of organisation and expansion. This meant that the League could never grow into a strong movement that might challenge the government or force its hand on the partition question. In addition, the government and the political parties got several side benefits.

By endorsing the League's publicity campaign, they got credit for trying to end the curse of partition. Once they had control of the movement, the more militants, activists and radicals who could be attracted into it, the better for Free State intelligence purposes. Because of the overlap of members of the League with various other organisations, the government plants in it would find it easier to penetrate some of these other organisations, too.

The League hoodwinked a lot of genuine people who left when they began to suspect it was a fake. Jack lost all enthusiasm and dropped out, first from the League and then out of my life altogether.

I remained in the League a little longer. Then, around June 1949, I resigned.

Before this I had come into contact in London with a number of people who were selling the *United Irishman*, at that time the official organ of the Republican movement. It was quite a small paper then, but there was good stuff in it. Its views were more in line with my own, and its contents were closer to what I had been looking for and had failed to find in the League. I asked the sellers if they could get me some back numbers and they did. I took them home and went through them very carefully.

The articles were well written and well documented. My eyes had already been opened to the desperate hypocrisy and make-believe of the Free State politicians, but this material helped me to see them more clearly. While these men pretended to be patriots, they had been persecuting Republicans and doing all they could to smash the

movement and end opposition to British rule in Ireland. Until the middle of that year I had not fully understood the true position in the Free State. I read up the facts in the *United Irishman* that summer. Profits which should have been put into establishing Irish industries based on agricultural produce were flowing out of the country instead. In demanding such industries, Republican writers at the end of the 'forties were simply saying what has since been confirmed by Common Market experts who have examined the Irish economy. The same mentality is evident in the export of lead and zinc from Irish mines by foreign companies for smelting abroad, when part of the profits should be put into high-capacity smelters which would supply an Irish metal industry. Workers lucky enough to get jobs in the Free State had the privilege of being a cheap labour force. But the profits that could really have raised the standard of living continued to be pumped abroad, and the terrible export of people continued.

I met the people from the *United Irishman* again and told them I was interested in working with them.

"Okay," they said. "Help us to sell the paper."

The following Sunday I was standing outside Highgate church with a bundle of copies under my arm as people came out from Mass. I saw Seán McGrath and other officials of the Anti-Partition League among them. They refused to buy the paper. That surprised me then, though it wouldn't now. I had better sales in Camden Town, Kilburn and Hyde Park. The *Irishman* seemed to go fairly well outside Irish dance halls too.

Apart from the paper, the Republican movement in England had a membership organisation called the United Irishmen. After selling the paper for a few weeks I joined it early in July. Again I was expecting to find a front for a revolutionary organisation, which would have been the logical back-up for the policies the paper discussed.

Once in, I discovered several young men who had joined with similar expectations. Out of these, about half a dozen took to meeting at my place, where we gradually crystallised into a group within the organisation. All but two of us were from the South of Ireland, myself and another lad born in England, and all except one were in our early twenties. The mood in this group was different from the wrangling and suspicion that surrounded the middle-aged politicians in the League. It was a real meeting of minds.

The others felt that while propaganda work, selling papers and raising funds were important, they were not enough. These were my own thoughts exactly.

We had to go carefully. The object of our group was to set up a unit of the national revolutionary organisation in London. The main group of United Irishmen, on the other hand, were quite content to play safe. They didn't want an IRA unit in London, because that could mean trouble for themselves. We decided we would have to risk working round them and secretly put our proposition direct to the Republican leadership in Dublin.

One of the group had arranged to go home to Ireland on a visit. We used him as our courier to contact the leadership, saw him on his way, and waited. When he returned he brought disappointing news. He had tried, as instructed, to establish contact with the IRA leaders. But the people in Dublin had reminded him that the United Irishmen were affiliated to Sinn Féin, the civil wing of the Republican movement. He was told there was no direct contact with the military wing. Somebody would get in touch with us in due course and advise us what to do. In the meantime, we should continue to push the paper, raise money and so on.

It was my first lesson in revolutionary security. We had made the first contact, but it would be they who chose the time and place. We waited again.

Finally a GHQ man arrived from Dublin to have a look at us and see what we were up to. We explained that we didn't see the United Irishmen as a useful or effective organisation. We wanted to join the military wing of the Republican movement. If we couldn't, then we wanted to come out openly in England as the political wing, Sinn Féin.

But some people were afraid that using the well known name Sinn Féin would only attract more British police attention to the movement's activities, and that many would be encouraged not to participate. The GHQ man weighed the arguments and returned to Dublin. Eventually we learned we had won.

In September 1949 I was taken into the military wing as a recruit with the other members of the group. We were given copies of its constitution to study.

"You will hear nothing for three months," we were told. If inside that time any reports reached Dublin about the existence of recruits in London, we would not be accepted. Second lesson in security.

We all took care to see that there was no loose talk during that probationary period. At the end of the three months we received confirmation from Dublin on official IRA notepaper that we had been formed as a unit. I was appointed OC.

Our strength at the beginning was only six. Later it expanded to sixteen, but I had to cut it back again. We found that when we had larger numbers talk started about the unit's existence. People had to be dropped for this.

I got in touch with some former Republican prisoners who had been in jail during the 1940s and were living in London. We looked up to these men because we hoped they would help us to build up an efficient unit. Much to our surprise, we discovered that most of them were not interested. We had to make out as best we could by ourselves.

We were handicapped in many ways. We had no experience of clandestine military organisations. Only the barest minimum contact was maintained between the London unit and GHQ for security reasons, and for a while we were out of the picture altogether. Back in Ireland, a newly raised unit could follow the model of existing units while it was sorting itself out. We couldn't, because the circumstances in England were completely different.

The most important difference was in training. In Ireland they had easy access to mountains and thinly populated areas, and the benefit of regular visits from GHQ and training officers to guide progress, keep up standards and give a new OC a helping hand from time to time. We had no such advantages of terrain or guidance, and our unit was not allowed to move out of London. The leadership in Dublin held us on a tight rein. They didn't want us running around the country, for reasons that were to make good sense as we learned more about our revolutionary business.

The IRA flying columns of earlier days were highly mobile striking forces with wide areas to operate in, and in 1949 a good deal of training material still reflected this. But we were a small urban unit operating in a very big city, and we had to develop methods suited to our own special needs. Whereas the flying columns were riflemen and machine-gunners, training for the London volunteers was in short arms, grenades and engineering theory. Instead of training in remote country areas, the unit paraded in hired halls, or in London County Council classrooms rented for the evening, though the landlords never guessed the true reason. Marksmanship was a problem that could hardly be solved in London. The most active training was

carried out in Ireland, and some of the London men attended training camps over there on visits home.

Around this period, I set out to obtain written material on national resistance movements in other countries, particularly in cities, as an aid in forming my own ideas. There was nothing like the range of revolutionary literature which is available nowadays, but even so some interesting books were coming out. There were a number on the Polish underground army in the 1944 Warsaw rising and their commander General Tadeusz Bor-Komorowski. That stand so impressed the Germans that they drew up plans to form a similar resistance themselves, and there were a good many lessons to be drawn from it. Another book which I read closely was *The Revolt* by Menachem Begin, one of the Jewish underground leaders who tied down 45,000 British troops and armed police, several RAF squadrons and the Mediterranean fleet in the Palestine campaign, preventing their being used to block India's progress towards independence. *Guerrilla Days in Ireland* by Tom Barry, one of the most successful fighting commanders of the early IRA, had been serialised by a Dublin paper. Now I read it again in book form, concentrating on the technical points.

Many of the principles Barry had laid down were still sound, including ways in which guerrilla forces should defend the population that supports them. When British troops harassed the people, his guerrillas retaliated against imperialist property targets, steadily raising the price for such harassment. As property is more important than anything else in a capitalist system, sooner or later the property owners become anxious about the behaviour of the troops. But I came to the conclusion that, in general, tactics would have to be updated. There had been great changes in military equipment since Barry's day. For example, the British vehicles his men ambushed and attacked were sitting ducks compared with those in the North today, where there is no soft-skinned transport operating at all. In the past, only a few well-off officers had been able to protect themselves with steel vests. Now British troops of all ranks had flak jackets. Helicopters were a problem for the modern rural guerrilla, who would have to work out answers to them. Improved radio communications enabled enemy reinforcements to be called up quickly from anywhere. All these changes had to be allowed for in bringing IRA training methods up to date, and we held discussions on them after every parade of the London unit.

Our main asset in the beginning was enthusiasm, and these

discussions produced all kinds of ideas which we put to Dublin at every opportunity. It was probably just as well that most of them were not accepted.

As far as strategy went, the Dublin leadership was firmly against any resumption of the bombing campaign in England. The previous bombing campaign in 1939–40 had run into difficulties for a number of reasons. It had been a sincere and determined effort to further the cause of Ireland's freedom and unity. The movement knew, from its knowledge of the average Englishman, that when trouble was far away from him he could not care less. But with acts of revolutionary war being carried out in his own towns and cities he might feel very differently. That had been the IRA logic behind the sabotage offensive in England.

But in fact it was the campaign itself that was sabotaged. Agents of the Dublin government succeeded in feeding information to the Irish Special Branch, who passed it on to their British counterparts. As a result, men and equipment were seized in England, in some cases as soon as they landed.

As commander of the London unit, I naturally devoted a good deal of thought to the pros and cons of past campaigns in England, and to the lessons that would have to be taken into account in any future one. I believed that operations in England should aim at carefully chosen targets, avoiding casualties among the civilian population as far as possible. Some risk to civilians is involved in every resistance campaign, unfortunately, but it is of no advantage at all to increase it by haphazard operations. In fact, these are counter-productive. It takes as much effort to mount a fruitless operation as an effective one.

I had seen for myself that German bombing did not weaken the British public, and Anglo-American bombing of German civilians did not break morale either. Any operations aimed at the civilian population would obviously harden public opinion against a just settlement for Ireland and enable the British government to take harsh measures against the Republican movement with full public support. I would be in favour of intensive operations in England only under certain circumstances, for example if a real doomsday situation obtained in the North of Ireland.

In a highly emotive situation like that, the aim should be to cause maximum damage to the economy by disrupting communications, calling the Irish workers in Britain out on strike, and attacking

targets of financial importance. The whole campaign would be approached by asking, as the starting point, how to cause thirty or forty million pounds worth of damage. Electricity supplies and transport are key elements in a big industrial economy. Small groups of men in a co-ordinated effort could knock out the big generators in the power stations which London depended on.

Later, when I worked on the railways, I realised that chaos could be created quite easily by knocking out the signal boxes at a few key railway junctions. Again a co-ordinated effort by small groups operating over a wide area would bring large sections of the British Railways system to a complete halt for several days, and have them working on a much reduced scale for weeks. Signal boxes, I discovered, took many weeks to replace.

But I believed that a continuous campaign in England was impossible. More than ninety-nine per cent of the people in England, including many of the Irish people there, would be hostile to it, and the police would have their full support and co-operation in neutralising it. The answer would be to use small sabotage groups instead of a large organisation for security reasons. These would select three or four very important targets with great care, make a really good job of them, then wait several months before repeating the operations. This is a far surer way of producing surprise and shock each time.

However, all that was a long way from the capabilities of our little unit at that time. The fact was that very little was known then about urban guerrilla strategy, and in any event most of our unit wanted to return to Ireland to live as soon as they could manage it.

Meanwhile, we carried out the instructions we received from Dublin from time to time to the best of our ability. Our main tasks were to collect information, investigate possibilities for purchasing supplies and equipment, and recruit suitable people. We also raised money for the military wing by collections among Irish sympathisers in London.

I myself concentrated on intelligence work. I realised the value of this early on and, on my own initiative, proposed to Dublin that I should report to them on various matters. They agreed, and asked me to develop this side of our activity in England, which I did. In a revolutionary force, every member should be an intelligence agent. I encouraged my comrades to report everything of interest they might see or hear. And later on, when I was appointed Director of Intelligence for the movement, I added to that "or read." In those

London days, I quickly learned how much a shrewd intelligence organisation can put together from systematic study of serious newspapers and military magazines, apart from the efforts of its own agents and contacts. There was a case in the 'thirties in which one man was able to build up the accurate order of battle of the German army just by close analysis of the German provincial press down to reports of dinners and even the engagement notices.

One of the priorities for any military organisation is to keep track of new weapons as they come out and report where a sample or a round or two of its ammunition may be obtained. It was important for the movement to keep up its knowledge of arms that might be used either by or against us. We used to spend a fair amount of time in the military section of Foyle's bookshop, usually looking for books that had just come out. We acquired a lot of data and training material in this way. In the London unit we had to look after our own counter-intelligence too. When we screened recruits or contacts, it was with a very watchful eye for possible attempts to penetrate the organisation by British or Free State agents. If the newcomers were Irish-born, I got Dublin to check out their backgrounds thoroughly. If they were born in Britain, we made our own discreet inquiries about them until I was satisfied.

On the whole, we did not have many disappointments with our recruits. Fifty per cent of that original London unit were still active in the organisation up to the time of my arrest in November 1972. Some returned to Ireland and rejoined the movement there, some left when they settled down at home, and others are in various parts of the world.

We compiled a comprehensive report on the United Irishmen, which had become an increasingly useless organisation since the setting-up of a real unit of the military wing. At our request, that organisation was wound up and, at the beginning of the 1950s, Sinn Féin was openly re-established as a political association in Britain. Our philosophy was that for revolutionary action to be meaningful, it had to be linked with cultural action. I had long realised the lack of a paper to meet the needs of the London Irish and emigrant sections. I joined a London cumann or branch of Sinn Féin, which launched a paper called *An Fiannach*, or *The Fenian*. We were able to start more Irish classes, run céilís and have a real social outlet in a Republican atmosphere. Some of us in the unit were married as well as myself, and with these new activities we had somewhere we could bring our wives.

In September 1950 I made my long awaited first trip to Ireland. I went home with Mary to visit her family. It was a deep emotional experience for me from the moment we set out from Paddington station on the boat-train for the journey to Fishguard in Wales. Even at that time of year, the train was packed with Irish people returning home for a holiday. The carriages were full of happiness and good humour, and it was the same on the boat. Everybody was obviously delighted to be going back, even for a visit.

It was a pleasant crossing on a nice night. When we got off the boat at Rosslare it was just daylight. I was able to get a good glimpse of the country I had waited so many years to see.

"At last," I said to myself. As I stepped ashore, I realised what Irish people born or brought up in England or America had meant when they tried to describe such moments in their own lives. But Mary gave me no time to think any more about it. "Come on," she said. "We'll never get a seat on the train."

All the way across Wexford and Waterford I took in every detail of the countryside and the scenery. The local hackney man from Castletownroche, my wife's home town, was waiting for us outside Fermoy station.

Everybody knew everybody. In England you could live twenty years beside someone and never be asked inside the front door. Here in Ireland I found the contrast astonishing. Relationships between neighbours in Castletownroche were close and friendly. There was a police barracks in the town manned by two or three Civic Guards, but I never saw much of them. It was a peaceful place, with a river running into the Blackwater.

I wanted to see as much as possible in the two weeks I would be in Ireland. Mary showed me the local beauty spots. Then, while she spent some time with her mother, I borrowed a bike and explored the countryside on my own. Three miles from the town I stopped to look at a stone cross beside the road. It was in memory of an IRA man killed during the so-called civil war of 1922-23. Mary told me her uncle had been with him the night he was shot. The man was an officer who had been attending a battalion council meeting. On his way back, he was fired at by a Free State army column. He took cover in a cabbage field, opened fire and engaged them on his own before he was hit. I saw many crosses like that on that first visit.

I took a bus to Cork city and went to the Republican plot in the cemetery where other martyrs of the movement were buried. Among

them were two great lord mayors of the city, Terence MacSwiney who wrote *Principles of Freedom* and died after seventy-four days on hunger strike in an English jail, and Tomás MacCurtain, murdered in his own house by British police who burst in with blackened faces. There were men lying there too who survived the war against the British only to be murdered by the Free State government in the hope of making Ireland safe for neo-colonialism.

I had a quick look around Cork before it was time to catch the bus back. It went across the Nagles mountains. The Republican guerrilla of the past had looked to the mountains as “his loyal allies.” But when the struggle for freedom was resumed in our own generation, the streets would be our allies too.

The Gaelic Athletic Association was another of the instruments which had united revolutionary action and popular culture. I had seen GAA matches played by exiles and visiting teams in London, but they looked out of place in the artificial setting of an English stadium. When I watched them now in Ireland, I understood how wise the old revolutionaries had been to encourage Irish sports as a weapon in preserving a sense of national identity. Hurling is one of the fastest and most exciting games in existence, but it goes back nearly two thousand years and is mentioned in the old epic legends of Ireland. I took a greater interest in it than in the football. After the matches, and at other times, I heard Irish music and went to céilís. At the beginning I would sit through half the dances until they persuaded me to get up on the floor and join in.

I was more certain than ever that there were no people in the world like the Irish for friendliness and hospitality. It was only when I tried to get them talking seriously on the national question, on what they felt about their brothers in the North, that I had my first disappointments. I found it very hard to get most people to express any firm views on the subject of Irish freedom.

“Leave these things to the politicians above in Dublin,” was the attitude of many I spoke to. “They’re well paid for it.”

I thought these might be characters who weren’t very typical, but I soon knew I was wrong. It was Mary who had been right, when she warned me a year before in London that I might find less patriotism than I expected.

When I tried to draw people out in conversation, my comments about Irish indifference did not pass unnoticed. We began to hear of local references to “Mary Casey’s husband the patriot.” Shortly

before we went on holiday, Mary had bought a new dress. It had a black flared skirt and a tan top. When some of her mother's friends saw it they remarked, "A fine patriot he must be if he buys you a Black and Tan dress." There they were, thinking about a symbol from the Anglo-Irish struggle of thirty years before while advising me not to bother about the injustice of the present.

I came back from that first visit to Ireland with very mixed feelings indeed. The land itself, and its beauty, had come fully up to my expectations. But I couldn't understand why more people did not set about ending the abuse of Ireland once and for all and make it into the prosperous country it so obviously could be. If it was prosperous enough for English capitalism to loot, it was worth the effort from its own people. But the Dublin politicians had led the people up blind alleys, doing as much as the English to maintain partition themselves.

All round me on the boat and the train going back to London, the results of these policies were only too clear. The atmosphere had changed completely from the good humour of the first crossing. People stood and sat with their own thoughts. The faces of exiles who had to go abroad for work were long and gloomy. The export of disillusioned human beings went on.

I was sorry myself to be leaving. Even though the strange deadness in the national spirit had been an eye-opener for me, I would have been willing to exist on anything to live in Ireland then. But I would have to be patient for the time being, as well as practical. Mary was expecting our first child.

After that trip, I realised there was still plenty for me to do in educating myself nationally. I wanted to know more about the relationship between the people and the Republican movement. Thinking back over the history of the movement I realised that although the revolutionary chain had remained unbroken ever since Wolfe Tone had defined the Republican objective of independence from England in 1798, the strength of popular support for it had varied from time to time. It seemed to bear out a focal theory of revolution long before it was spelled out by Che Guevara and others. Guerrillas who want to bring social and political change do not wait for conditions to become "ripe" for revolutionary action, because they could be waiting for ever. Instead, they take the field and gradually build up popular support through their successes. It was fairly clear that when the Republican movement was energetic and

successful, the people rallied to it. When it was weak and ineffective, they didn't.

But ineffective movements do not last unbroken for a hundred and fifty years. Writers and scholars everywhere had understood the political importance of 1916 as the first of the great national revolutions of the twentieth century, and the beginning of the end for the British empire. From the military point of view, the IRA stood high too. The type of guerrilla warfare it developed under leaders like Barry, Seán Treacy and Ernie O'Malley had been copied by revolutionary movements all over the world, and studied as a model by irregular warfare experts in many countries, including England itself. There was not much anyone could be cynical about in such a record.

I realised what a sham the freedom of the South was and is. In thirty years of pseudo-independence, the Twenty-Six County area had changed its name three times, from the Irish Free State to Eire to "the Republic." None of these changes left the people any better off. Every year tens of thousands, like those I saw on the boat, were forced to leave Ireland in search of work, while foreigners owned the largest estates in the country. Irish families had to make what they could of very small holdings, while descendants of British planters with feudal titles of lords, dukes and earls lived in castles and big houses on a thousand or fifteen hundred acres of the best land. Meanwhile, petty local politicians exploited the situation by selling jobs and favours.

I soon came to see that my disappointment on that first visit to Ireland was due more to my inexperience than to anything else. The people in the South knew their politicians. They didn't expect any better of them. What good would it be talking of liberation, solidarity and national principle to such men, whose only real interests were directorships and vote-catching? I was learning what every apprentice revolutionary must learn. It is no good blaming the people for doing nothing. If a rotten system is making them cynical, he must set out to change the system, not the people.

We had decided that if Mary gave birth to a boy we would call him Micheál and if it was a girl we would call her Catherine.

Catherine was born at the beginning of 1951. We were becoming a real family now. When it was just Mary and myself, I very often felt guilty being out so much on business either for the military wing or

Sinn Féin, leaving her on her own. For that reason, one of her sisters came to stay with us. The arrival of Catherine took the loneliness out of that situation. She was great company for all of us.

About that time, there was a ring at the doorbell, which had our name on it in Irish and English. I opened the door and stared. There were two men outside in immaculate fancy dress. They had bowler hats, rolled umbrellas and, believe it or not, spats.

"Is MacStiofáin the Irish for Stephenson?" one of them asked politely.

I told him it was. He said they were Special Branch, though I thought to myself the spats were more MI-5 style. They asked if they could come inside as they didn't want to stand on the doorstep.

"It has come to our notice that you are involved in an Irish organisation Sinn Féin," they said. I had been observed speaking and distributing literature.

Theoretically, that should put me in no immediate danger, because such activities were not illegal in England.

"What we should like to know are the aims, objectives and methods of this organisation," one of them went on. It became clear to me what they were up to. The political police everywhere live on files and dossiers. They were trying to get new records together on the emergent Sinn Féin structure in England.

"Well," I replied, "its aims and objectives are the overthrow of British rule in Ireland."

They laughed at this.

"And how is it proposed to achieve that?"

"By any means open to the organisation," I said.

"Is it a military organisation?"

I said it wasn't.

They were scrupulously polite throughout. They apologised for causing any inconvenience to Mary and me before leaving. Others had come under notice as well as myself. When I checked up, I discovered that my visitors had paid three or four calls asking similar questions.

In June 1951 I visited Ireland again. I had chosen that time of year because, apart from visiting Cork, it would also enable me to take part in the annual Bodenstown ceremonies.

On these occasions, members of the movement from all over Ireland assemble at the village of Sallins, about two and a half miles

from an old Protestant churchyard at Bodentown in County Kildare. They march to Wolfe Tone's grave there, then wreaths are laid in commemoration of the founder of Irish Republicanism, buglers sound the Last Post, and a leading Republican delivers an oration. This speech is of considerable significance, as can be gathered from the number of detectives' notebooks that are opened when it starts. In it the leadership reviews the movement's progress in the past year and announces policy lines for the next.

For the first time, I marched on that historic pilgrimage with sincere and dedicated men among the banners and the green uniforms of Fianna Eireann, the Republican youth movement. I felt proud, but humble as well. I was marching on the same road as Tom Clarke, Pearse and Connolly must have done when they led their volunteers to Bodentown in the years before 1916. After them, in all the years since then, great and courageous men and women had marched. Now, on all sides of me, were others determined to strengthen this movement we belonged to and to resume the same national struggle at the first opportune moment. There was a powerful feeling of continuity and of comradeship.

Several of the lads from the London unit came over to march at Bodentown too. As we swung along that summer afternoon, I thought of how a company of London Irish volunteers, many of them men who had never seen Ireland before, had arrived in Dublin a week or two before the 1916 rising to take part in it. Many a Cockney and Liverpool accent was heard in the fighting in the General Post Office that Easter, and again in the Republican garrison defending the Four Courts in 1922. All were comrades in the movement, just as we were that day.

The day was a complete success in every way. It enabled us to meet a number of Republicans from different parts of the country, and this helped our morale even further. Many of them had already endured imprisonment.

Bodentown got rid of many of the misgivings I had had on my first visit to Ireland. I came back from Ireland immensely heartened, more committed than ever to the Republican cause and to continuing my activities in it. I was also more determined than ever to achieve my other ambition, that of making my life in Ireland.

Back in our house in London, I looked at my daughter Catherine in her cot.

"I want her to grow up in Ireland," I said.

“So do I,” said Mary.

Towards the end of the year I decided to take work on British Railways as a shunter. The building trade had become unstable, whereas the railways were short of staff. With shift work and overtime, this job was well paid. Another advantage was that I could get tickets to Ireland for myself and my family free or at quarter-fare. I found the British railwayman a good solid type of worker. There was camaraderie and solidarity among the train crews, shunters and signalmen, though less so in the case of the platform men.

I joined the railway trade union. But when, in addition to my ordinary dues, I was asked to pay the political levy for the Labour Party funds, I refused. The Labour Party supported the partition and economic exploitation of Ireland. As a result of my refusal, I had quite a dispute with the union branch secretary, but I stuck to my guns and eventually won my point.

Several other members of the Republican movement in London had taken a similar stand. Now we were encouraging all Irish workers in Britain not to pay the levy until the party withdrew its support for partition.

Meeting one of the Connolly Association people while selling our paper one weekend, I told him about my argument with the union official. He disagreed with my attitude. When the next issue of their paper *The Irish Democrat* came out, it had a feature entitled *Why You Should Pay the Political Levy*. This was presented as a reply to “A query from an Irish exile.” It was then the policy of the Communist Party of Great Britain not to attack the Labour Party. Consistent with this policy, the Connolly Association was in effect urging Irish workers in England to subsidise a party that perpetuated partition.

That taught me that organisations which tried to mix two allegiances were useless and dangerous. The Connolly Association criticised the IRA and condemned the use of physical force against British occupation forces in Ireland. At the same time it was supporting the selfsame strategy of revolutionary force in Malaya, where it hadn't a hope. I wondered if they thought the Russian revolution they admired so much had been achieved without physical force. But it was no good arguing with them. In those days the party line was whatever Stalin said it was from one week to the next. There was no way of balancing these double loyalties to ensure that Irish freedom would be put first. Trying to do so was only playing with

disaster, I felt. And a bitter day lay ahead when I would be proved right.

I became an anti-communist for several reasons, and they were all simple ones. Stalin's betrayal of the Republicans in the Spanish civil war had made fascism stronger in Europe. The European communist parties were a ridiculous example for national revolutionaries, being completely dominated by another country, taking part in capitalist parliaments, and dodging the issue with half-hearted reformist programmes. Even if they had made a real effort, you would no more achieve a free and just social order under a Soviet state than you would under a capitalist one. If your aim was equality, how could you back a system founded on inequality? If you hated imperialism, how could you uphold the creation of a new empire by military occupation? These were the questions raised by Republican writers in the *United Irishman* and elsewhere during the 1950s. What happened later in Budapest and Prague showed whether we were on the wrong track or not.

Any revolutionary who expected Ireland to accept a Russian-type society would be wasting his time. The social system the Republican movement preached in those days was far closer to the particular needs of the Irish people. It was distributive ownership or co-operativism, with some nationalisation of certain key resources. Maybe it was not so well understood then, but today it can easily be seen as the system most suited to Irish conditions.

But while I had a low opinion of Stalinists, I have always had respect for the Asian communists, who showed themselves to be real revolutionary fighters. Unfortunately, though they had won the Chinese civil war, at that time they were not able to push British colonialism out of Malaya. The British succeeded in driving a wedge between the Chinese and Malay peoples there, and the Malays largely stayed out of the fighting. When it became apparent that it was mostly Chinese guerrillas who were waging the anti-imperialist struggle, I didn't think they would win. The British General Templer and his ruthless director of "special measures", the former Special Air Service officer Calvert, were able to bring pressure on the Malay villagers to deny bases to the guerrillas. We were very pleased when the guerrillas hit back and assassinated the colonial high commissioner, Sir Henry Gurney.

I knew that the struggle for Ireland's freedom was only part of the worldwide struggle against imperialism. Therefore I and other Repub-

licans rejoiced at the successes of any other movement fighting a true revolutionary war, and we mourned at their defeats. But I noticed that while the *Daily Worker* reported various battles for independence against capitalist powers, it never mentioned the underground in the communist countries.

I was opening up contacts through which the London unit could exchange information with revolutionary organisations abroad. Gradually we got a good flow of stuff coming in and out, and some of these contacts made in the early days were to be of great value to the IRA in later years. I was even receiving material from the People's National Party in Guiana, the one British colony on the South American mainland.

I got to know members of other movements at a Celtic Nations rally in Trafalgar Square and became friends with several of them. Among them were people from Wales who were producing an excellent paper, the *Welsh Republican*. I was introduced to a man from the Breton organisation Breizh Atao who had been sentenced to death by the French but escaped and came to Ireland. I got copies of *The Celtic Times*, edited by a Scot named David Stevenson (it was another few months before we knew of the existence of the Scottish Republican Army when they carried out a number of operations).

I found myself wishing that we ourselves had more material of this standard. But in fact the boot was on the other foot. They envied us.

"If only we in Wales had the revolutionary tradition you have in Ireland, what a difference it would make to us," one of the Welshmen said. I liked and felt close to these people of the other Celtic nations. Nor was it an illusion on my part. When I was imprisoned, these Welsh Republican friends were to be very kind to my wife and family over six years.

But Mary and I still had a few months of happiness left to us. In December 1952 our second daughter, Máire Óg, was born. She was a real Christmas present in more ways than one. I got an income-tax rebate, and Mary bought gifts for us all. Apart from that windfall, we were saving every penny we could, from my wages and overtime so that we could eventually live in Ireland and bring our children up there. We would need four or five hundred pounds to move our furniture, find somewhere to live and make a decent start.

In 1953 I was entering my fourth year of service in the Republican movement, which had expanded gradually since I joined it. After lying low during the long hard phase of reorganisation, it had shown

the first signs since the Second World War of preparing to renew the armed struggle for Irish liberation. These had begun with the Ebrington arms raid in Derry. If a revolutionary movement is not active, it dies. On the other hand, even small-scale successful actions in the early stages help to attract recruits and increase popular support, because there will always be plenty of people who like to see David making off with Goliath's weapons.

I had done what I could to bring IRA training, at least in my own unit, into line with the needs of the urban guerrilla, and to anticipate the array of modern weapons and equipment the men might have to face. For example, I had sent to Ireland some of the first walkie-talkies that became available in England. I encouraged people to improve their knowledge of modern communications and their role in urban revolution, urging the monitoring of police and military broadcasts. (Later this was to save me from arrest, when IRA monitors in the North one night heard British military wavelengths put out the message: *Seán MacStiofáin leaving Belfast by car. Intercept.* I was warned and changed my plans.)

In early 1953 I was gratified that at long last I was on my way to achieving my three ambitions.

I was happy to be married to Mary, to have a home and family. But my satisfaction came too from having committed myself to the Republican movement and having been tested in it. I had become a working revolutionary, intent on living in Ireland and taking my place in what we prayed would be the final and successful fight to achieve her freedom.

I didn't think then that Mary and the two girls would be living in Ireland for a long, long time before I would. Halfway through that year, I received my operational instructions to raid the Officers Training Corps armoury of Felsted School in Essex. Soon afterwards, I was a prisoner in Wormwood Scrubs.

Chapter 4

Wormwood Scrubs

In the exercise yard our first morning in Wormwood Scrubs, Manus and I were left in no doubt about the special category we were in. There were about two hundred and fifty prisoners walking around the yard, and about twenty warders watching them. But the two of us were made to walk on our own in a circle in the middle of the yard. At least it meant we could talk without being overheard by the staff or by stool-pigeons.

“Twos and threes!” the warders shouted every now and then at the other prisoners. This was their way of breaking up groups that started to bunch together as the men walked round. But there were a couple of them who never took their eyes off Manus and myself.

We would have to start thinking about getting ourselves organised and developing a contact line out of the prison. For the time being, subject as we were to the strictest security precautions, it was best to go carefully. As we discussed our situation during that first exercise in the Scrubs together, we decided not to make any plans just yet until we had learned the routine of the place and knew what was what.

Before lunch we were taken off to work. Manus was put into the tailor shop. I found myself in that prison establishment I had so often heard of, the mailbag shop. It was a big Nissen hut with ninety or a hundred prisoners working in it. The staff consisted of five men known as “technical officers” and two in charge of discipline, who stood at each end of the hut and watched the prisoners.

I was given a pair of scissors and told to remember the number on them. Then I was taken over to a treadle sewing-machine and shown how to work it. One of the “technical officers” gave me some lengths

of canvas and told me to practise on the machine. You had to hold it in position as it went through the machine, and the constant pull of the coarse canvas soon wore the ends of my fingers raw. After years of that work, they remain very sensitive to the present day.

At the end of an hour or so the officer in charge of the mailbag shop shouted, "Tools up!" The prisoners put on their coats and began handing their tools into the stores. We came out of the shop in a line to be searched. "You wait behind," a warder said to me. When the others had been marched off, he told me to walk beside him. I noticed he had a small notebook in his hand. Written on the cover was my number, 1548. When we got back to D Hall he handed me over to a PO and got his signature in the book. The time of my handover was noted down too. Everywhere I went, that book went. It was the same with Manus. We were signed for all the time. This was a simple but effective method of keeping prison staff on their toes in regard to the A-list prisoners. If anything happened there was no chance of blaming anyone else. Responsibility for us was always pinned down to whichever officer was the latest to have his signature in the book.

The other security precautions were equally tight. Most of the prisoners in D Wing had their meals in association at the tables and were allowed an hour in the yard after lunch and again after tea. Manus and I were always taken right up to the head of the food queue. Then we carried our meal straight up to our cells and were locked in. It was over three years before we were allowed to eat below.

I met Manus again after lunch in the exercise yard. As we walked round the inner circle together, he told me he had been put on a machine making socks in the tailor shop. He didn't like the work, so he had got off it by pretending he couldn't do it and was given another job instead.

We marched back to the mailbag shop in work parties of twenty-five or so with two warders in charge. Others covered the route all the way. I put in another hour and a half at the mailbag business. Then I collected my tea, took it up to the cell under escort and was locked up for the night. After that the cell door would be opened only once for the rest of the night when the cocoa came around at half-past seven. It took a while to get used to drinking it without sugar, but it helped me to sleep. Lights went out at nine-thirty, but the one in my cell would go on again every hour

throughout the night when the watchman opened the spyhole to check on me. Though this woke me up every time at first, after a while I found I was able to adapt myself to it.

For the first three years in Wormwood Scrubs these security precautions remained in force for both of us. We were locked up for about nineteen and a half hours a day, and over twenty hours on Saturdays and Sundays.

On the second night after work I carried my tea up to my cell and found a sheet of prison notepaper and an envelope for me to write to my family. I told Mary not to worry about me, that I was in good spirits, and that food and conditions were better in the Scrubs than they were in Brixton. It was more important to me that she would be able to take good care of herself and our two little girls. I hoped that payments from the Republican prisoners' aid fund, Cumann Cabrach, had begun to come through. The fund did not have large resources. It paid five pounds a week to my wife during the first year, and six pounds a week afterwards. However, the Welsh Republican friends I had met the year before in London were to show their kindness to my family in many ways while I was in the Scrubs, and I am not likely to forget this solidarity.

As far as my own situation was concerned, I could be more philosophical, for all revolutionaries continually face the risk of imprisonment. I knew Republicans, some of them close friends of mine, who had served ten years in English prisons under the most terrible conditions during the 1940s. Many of them underwent mass attacks by English prisoners who were often urged on by warders. It would have been bad enough if these attacks and beatings had been spontaneous, but it was quite sickening that they were frequently provoked by Union Jack "patriots" in the prison service, which was a reserved occupation during the war and exempt from military duty.

The Republican prisoners in the Curragh internment camp in Ireland during the 1939–45 war had developed, to an outstanding extent, the idea of prison as the university of the revolution. They ran facilities themselves to provide formal secondary and higher education for those who had had no opportunity to receive it. Many of the Curragh lads got a first-class education in this way, and some who eventually came out from behind the wire were noted as scholars and writers. The other advantage was the thorough grounding you could get in revolutionary theory, tactics, politics, social and economic matters and related subjects. I later heard from Bretons

and other members of freedom movements how they had done the same thing in prison, both in formal and revolutionary education.

Not being among our own comrades, Manus and I could not have this kind of group educational activity. We certainly had our Republican philosophy to keep us going. But being confined to our cells for almost twenty hours a day meant that we would have to get on with studying on our own. So on our third day in the Scrubs we were taken to see the prison educational officer, who was the Church of England chaplain.

He was small and skinny, with glasses, and did his best to be helpful. He asked us what we wanted to do, and we had a talk with him. Manus and I decided we both wanted to study accountancy, the subject I had started to read up in Brixton. The chaplain said there would be no difficulty in obtaining the correspondence courses once he recommended them. There would be three separate courses starting with book-keeping, going on to general accounting and then to advanced accountancy. They would take a period of about three years, and we could follow them up with extension courses provided we passed the examinations. He promised to arrange all this for us, and he kept his word. Within about ten days we both received the textbooks, notes and other material, together with extra notebooks, pens and pencils from the educational department. To give those British educational authorities their due, that part of the prison system, at least, was twenty years ahead of the ignorance and backwardness of the Dublin government's jails, and it still is.

We told the chaplain that the Principal Officer in D Wing had refused our application for getting back some Irish language textbooks which were with our personal property in the reception block. The PO said we would have to wait six weeks before we were allowed books, but we pointed out to the chaplain that these were of an educational nature.

"I see no reason why you shouldn't have them," he said. "Put down for an interview with the deputy governor and tell him I have no objection."

I took his advice, and next day I put down to see the deputy governor and apply for the Irish books. First you had to tell the PO why you wanted an interview. I told him about the books.

"No books unless you've been in here six weeks."

I explained what the chaplain had said.

"Well," said the PO, "you can put that yarn to him, but I don't think it'll get you anywhere."

He was right. That deputy governor only granted one request of mine in two and a half years. I was told he had been a prisoner of war of the Japanese and had it in for the two of us, particularly myself.

When he turned me down on the books I said to Manus, "Look, you'll have to start writing out the lessons on the toilet paper again like we did in Brixton. You know I was determined to learn the language there. I'm doubly determined now with that bastard trying to stop me."

Manus began to slip me his bits of paper at exercise once more, and up in my cell I really got stuck in on them and was soon making progress.

There was quite a good central library in Wormwood Scrubs. You could have two books and change them twice a week, which meant four a week.

It had thousands of books on a wide range of subjects, and some of them were quite up to date. I found several on accountancy, costing, management techniques and so on. It wasn't bad on politics either. I was rather surprised to find a number of books on Soviet Russia and various communist movements, by no means all critical. I tackled *Mein Kampf* and *Das Kapital* as well. Parts of Hitler's book made me laugh and other parts depressed me. I made several fresh attempts to get through Marx, but I never succeeded all the way. On the other side of the political fence, I read *I Believed* by Douglas Hyde, the former editor of the *Daily Worker* who had left the party to become a Catholic and an active anti-communist. At least there was a cross-section of different views and opinions in the prison library. As long as ideas were confined to books, you would not have too much trouble in England. It was when people set out to put them into practice that the national hypocrisy showed itself.

After four weeks were up, I applied for a visit from my wife. A few days later Mary came to the prison to see me. She was alone. I was glad to see that she was showing no sign of strain and was in fact looking quite terrific.

"Are you getting enough to eat?" was her first question.

Our meeting was very strictly supervised. I had a warder standing directly behind me, watching and listening to everything we said. We were in a kind of box with a glass panel preventing any direct contact. To hear each other, Mary and I had almost to shout through a grille.

We were supposed to have half an hour. After twenty minutes of trying to communicate in this way, I said something, I forget what, that included the word "bloody." Immediately the warder behind me butted in and snapped officiously, "No swearing."

At this, Mary lost her temper and said I needed no advice from him on how to conduct myself. After five more minutes, the warder stopped the visit. I was taken out of the box and escorted back to the mailbag shop.

On the way over he said, "Was that your wife?"

"Yes."

"Well, she can't carry on here as if she was outside, you know."

"I saw nothing wrong with her behaviour," I said. As for his idiotic rebuke about "bloody," I told him I heard as much foul language from the staff as from the prisoners. He pulled status on me and warned me that a prisoner did not answer a prison officer back.

I had had just about enough of this pomposity, which had ruined the visit for Mary after she had waited so long to get in to see me. "Look," I said, "if you make a remark to me that I find unacceptable, I'm going to reply. If you feel like putting me before the governor about it, go ahead. But don't you pass any remarks about my wife."

He did not reply, but just handed me over to the disciplinary officer at the mailbag shop with a parting wisecrack to save face. Later I concluded that the man had been more nervous than ill-intentioned, because as he came to know Manus and me better he proved quite good to us. Having signed for me, he was on edge all through the visit and over-reacted. Nobody was ever sure what the IRA might do next.

The atmosphere was a lot better for Mary's next visit. This time I was escorted by a Welsh warder who had been on duty in the library. Mary brought little Catherine with her, and the Welshman made things as easy as he could for us. He didn't breathe down the back of my neck, and he let us talk for the best part of an hour. The time after that, my wife came in with Máire, who was then barely a year old. Máire had not seen me for several months. She was frightened by the strange surroundings and did not seem to know me. It was only gradually that she came to accept me again.

You had to be in the Scrubs for three months before you could have a photograph of your family sent in to you. From then on, I used to receive a picture of Mary and the two little girls around the end of each year.

Now that Manus and I were in regular touch with our relatives again, and the first delays and anxieties had been cleared up, it was easier to settle down to the prison routine.

Christmas 1953 arrived, the first of the several I was to spend in captivity either in England or Ireland. We heard there were to be extra rations, which interested us very much as we were not allowed to receive any food parcels at Wormwood Scrubs. On Christmas Day and St. Stephen's Day there were Sunday rations, plus Christmas pudding and cake. But for me the big treat was a pint of tea served with the Christmas dinner. It was the only day of the year you were allowed tea with the midday meal.

A couple of days before, an officer came up to me in the mailbag shop and asked, "Just how many people do you know in Ireland?"

It was a queer kind of question, and I wasn't able to make much sense of it.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because I'm sick of going in and out of your cell all day long with Christmas cards," he grumbled. It was the first I'd heard of it, but it sounded great. When I got back to my cell, I found he had not exaggerated. Manus and I received literally hundreds of cards from Republicans and sympathisers that Christmas.

By the close of the year Manus and I had adapted ourselves fairly well to our circumstances. We were deep in our correspondence courses and were both studying book-keeping. We were both brushing up on our English and making full use of the central library, particularly in our political reading. I was getting ahead with my study of Irish, and Manus had started learning German.

We had kept to the decision we had agreed on during one of our first walks together in the exercise yard. We had determined that we would not waste a minute of our time at the Scrubs, and we would make no plans about escape until we knew if we were going to be left there or moved somewhere else. It takes months and sometimes years to learn the routines and geography and organise a break from a place like that, as some of the successful escapers told us afterwards.

There were certain consequences of being on the A-list which prevented Manus and me from falling altogether into a rut. I had just about got used to my second-floor cell after the first week when a warder came in and said, "Come on. You're moving." I was taken downstairs and put into a new cell in the Ones, while Manus was transferred up to the Twos. There were five or six other prisoners on

special watch who had previously escaped or were suspected, because of informers, of planning breakouts. They were moved about very often, too. But whereas they were taken off the list after twelve months, Manus and I remained on it throughout our entire time in the Scrubs.

In three years we must have changed cells three hundred times, being moved from floor to floor and even from hall to hall. We were never put into a cell the other had occupied. This meant that the person inside the cell would never have time to do any work on it for an escape attempt, no one outside would know where we were from one week to the next, and neither of us could “inherit” any useful objects hidden in the other’s old cell, even if they survived the careful daily searches.

Throughout our years of imprisonment we were also sustained by our belief in God and in the practice of our religion, which I have always found to be a great consolation any time I have been in a tight spot. On Saturday mornings we were taken out from the mailbag shop and across to the small Catholic chapel. There we would have benediction, followed by confession for anyone who wanted to go. On Sundays we would have Mass at about half-past ten. From 1953 to 1956, if we went to Communion it meant that we got no breakfast, so we went only every second week. After that, things changed, as we shall see.

Manus and I had now reached a stage where we had no spare time on our hands at all. This is the secret of serving your time in prison the easy way compared with doing it the hard way. In Wormwood Scrubs I saw a number of prisoners crack up. Some of them lacked any fundamental belief in life, other than trying to live off society. When they could no longer do this they had nothing to draw on for the strength to carry them through their sentences.

There were several suicides in the prison while we were there. My first experience of a prisoner taking that awful way out was with a poor devil in the cell immediately above me when I was still a new resident in D2. Late one night I heard a crash overhead and wondered what had happened. But as there was no more noise I went back to sleep. Next morning I heard that my neighbour upstairs had tried to hang himself with his sheets and had been taken to hospital. He was serving four years. After two weeks in the hospital he reappeared and moved down to the first floor so that a special eye could be kept on him. But I soon heard him telling another prisoner, “I shall never do it. I just can’t.”

Sure enough, a few weeks later he tried to hang himself again and once more he was taken to hospital. When given a razor blade to shave he promptly slashed the veins in his wrists, and this time he succeeded in killing himself. It caused a lot of gloom in the Scrubs. A suicide always upsets a prison and makes anyone who is feeling despondent even more so. The authorities try to stop word getting out, but it always does. Prisoners working in the hospital carry the news back to their own wings and it soon spreads through the whole jail.

Many men in the Scrubs had been convicted of sexual offences. Under the English judicial system, such offenders received very heavy sentences. Terms of four, six or eight years were common for cases concerning women and girls, and twelve, fourteen or even twenty years for those involving young boys. Serious though such things are, I wonder whether sentencing men to such terrible terms of imprisonment is really the answer to that particular problem.

A lot more were in for fraud, usually accountants, solicitors and office workers. As for murderers, in 1953 there were more than twenty in Wormwood Scrubs who had been sentenced to death and reprieved. This number gradually increased to well over thirty by the time we left. In addition, several other murderers had been transferred to other jails. Grievous bodily harm, armed hold-ups and robbery with violence had brought countless men into prison, and continued to do so at a high rate during our stay. Considering how ready the English were to deplore violence elsewhere, they were in no position to point to their own cities as examples to others.

In fact, the establishment itself was quite strongly represented among the prisoners. Apart from the crooked lawyers, we had a former Member of Parliament, nearly thirty ex-clergymen and about twenty ex-policemen at different times. The clergymen had been ministers of various Protestant denominations. I only came across one Catholic priest serving a sentence in the Scrubs. He was a Frenchman who had been given nine months for smuggling watches. There were no rabbis there at all.

The ex-cops were doing average sentences of two to four years, but some had stiff terms of up to seven. We had crooked detectives as well. A former detective inspector, detective sergeant and detective constable began their sentences towards the end of our own term. They had been convicted in what was known as the "Brighton police scandal" for perverting the course of justice. Many a prisoner lived in hope that the policeman who had arrested him, or better still

the judge who had sentenced him, would be caught out one day and turn up in the Scrubs himself.

When trouble broke out among prisoners in the Scrubs, the main cause was almost invariably tobacco. At the beginning we were paid one shilling and eightpence a week for the work we did — that is, about nine new pence. This gradually increased to just under four shillings, or twenty pence. Neither Manus nor I smoked. He used to buy sweets with his earnings. I scarcely used to spend mine at all, apart from an occasional pound of sugar or a jar of pickles. At Christmas I would send my prison savings home so that Mary could buy the children a present from me.

For prisoners who smoked, the average weekly earnings were just enough to buy half an ounce of tobacco, a box of matches and a packet of cigarette papers. Most of them, of course, found this inadequate — a situation that made things very easy for the tobacco barons. I don't suppose there has ever been a prison without its barons, who somehow get hold of goods that are in demand and short supply and sell them to their fellow prisoners at exorbitant black market prices. Methods may differ, but the tobacco racket in Wormwood Scrubs worked on more or less classical lines. The key element in it was a very high interest rate.

A prisoner-speculator could get into business with one week's pay. To do it, he had to go without smoking himself for that week, which ruled it out for the weak characters. He invested the money in half an ounce of tobacco. He would divide this into four lots of one-eighth of an ounce each and lend them out to four separate prisoners. They had to pay him back the following week with a quarter of an ounce. This meant that he made a hundred per cent profit on the transaction and now had a full ounce of tobacco to trade with. He would lend this out in turn in eighths or quarters, but never more than a quarter of an ounce at a time. The trick was to keep the amounts inside the borrower's weekly income until the baron had accumulated enough business to deal on a bigger scale.

This required some organisation, so if the baron wanted to expand it was necessary to work in a ring. In a few weeks his stock would grow enormously. But as regulations did not allow prisoners to possess more than two ounces of tobacco at a time, he needed "carriers" he could trust to hold the stocks for him. For holding two ounces, the carriers would be paid a quarter-ounce a week. He would

also need a muscle-man to enforce the repayments, or often the baron and his two carriers would provide the muscle themselves.

If a borrower was slow in returning the loan plus interest, they would go along to him and say, "You didn't pay back this week. What about it?"

The prisoner would often say, "I'm sorry. Will you give me till next week?" If he didn't pay up the second week, it usually meant that the defaulter would get a thumping at the first opportunity from the baron and his helpers. Some of the rings grew very big and would have strong-arm squads to do the thumping for them, and maybe five or six carriers holding the stocks.

When the baron had built up his stocks to eight ounces or so, he would split them into two. He would go on using half his tobacco to trade in his usual way and gradually accumulate more. But with the rest he would start trading for money instead. He would contact prisoners who were either well-off themselves or had relatives outside who would be willing to pay around a pound an ounce. The person outside would send the money to someone nominated by the baron. I knew barons who were making twenty and thirty pounds a week clear in this way after paying the overheads of the ring, during a sentence of three or four years. As long as the nominee could be trusted, the baron would have a stake of a few thousand pounds waiting for him when he came out.

It was this tobacco racket which lay behind almost all the fights and beatings-up which occurred while I was in the Scrubs. There were a few particularly nasty incidents, and the reason was always the same. A prisoner would get himself heavily into debt and be barred by two or three barons at once. He couldn't pay them all back and would end up with a severe beating.

Our relations with the prison staff varied considerably. The governor in charge during our first three years wasn't bad. But, afraid for his life that we were going to escape, he supervised our security arrangements personally. He did however allow us certain requests that other officials refused, and I found it better if we applied to see the governor himself.

The warders and POs fell into three types. There were the vindictive kind who went out of their way to make a prisoner's life as unpleasant as possible. Fortunately these were not prevalent in the Scrubs. Even fewer were the extremely decent type who did what

they could to help prisoners. The great majority just did the job, no more and no less. If they found you breaking the rules, they would put you on report and you would be duly punished. But they wouldn't exert themselves to look for trouble, and many would warn a prisoner two or three times before they reported him.

We found officers who recognised a difference between criminal and political prisoners, no matter what English law said. They understood that we were in prison because of principles. One Welsh officer was very pleasant and saw to it that we got our books and newspapers. Kindness was also shown to us from a very unexpected source indeed. There were British ex-servicemen of every sort in the prison service. Those in the Scrubs included former members of the Palestine Police, a force which had a lot in common with the Black and Tans (in fact some of the older ones had been Tans themselves). As IRA prisoners we were naturally not popular with that crowd. But one of these warders who had been in Palestine turned out to be most decent towards us, and over the years he did a good deal to fill me in on details of that campaign.

For the first six months the only papers we were permitted were English Catholic journals. This was one of the stranger aspects of a system that denied political prisoners the treatment given to criminals. When the restriction on our reading was finally lifted, I put my name down for the *Daily Telegraph* and the *Sunday Observer*. Apparently it was felt that the news might be less dangerous if it was delayed, so we received the papers two or three days late. I didn't mind. When you have always been deeply interested in what is happening in the world, it is a weird sort of experience to be shut off from news of it for six months. When I got the papers, it was like being reconnected after a blackout.

Though the *Telegraph* is, of course, an ultra-Tory paper, I got it because it was bigger than most of the others and had more news. Reading everything closely and carefully, you studied the news far more thoroughly than in life outside and analysed it for the meaning behind it. You noticed contradictions and changes in policy from week to week that you might easily miss in ordinary circumstances. I followed the French-Indochina war as it was fought out, and I studied the progress of the anti-colonial struggle in Kenya, which appeared to be going badly for the Kenya Land Army.

I looked forward to the evening now. As soon as I had been searched and signed for after work, I would collect my tea, go up and

be locked in. As soon as the cell door banged, I felt almost at home and yet, at the same time, less confined. Whether serving in the air force or in the Republican movement, you picked up the knack of being comfortable in strange conditions, and it is a long-term prisoner's knack too. I liked the privacy and never felt lonely, except for Mary and the girls. I would have my tea and read for the first hour. I was able to follow international affairs, military and political events again, and I read each paper two or three times over, as one does in prison, devouring them line by line. Then I would settle down to study until lights out at half-past nine, after which the Scrubs would be as quiet as a tomb.

At four o'clock one afternoon I was taken out of the mailbag shop and over to the governor's office. "I understand today is your birthday," he said. "Is that correct?"

I said cautiously that it was, doubting that he had sent for me to wish me many happy returns. But to my amazement, that is exactly what he did. I thanked him, wondering what this was about.

With the air of a man conferring some vast personal gift he said, "A birthday card has arrived from your wife together with a letter. I have decided to issue the card. You will get it tonight. The letter will have to go up to Scotland Yard in the ordinary course of events." And Mary's card was "issued" to me that night. I don't know why they assumed that cards were harmless and letters weren't. De Valera was once rescued from Lincoln jail by means of a card. It contained a pattern from which a key was cut.

One of my clearest memories of the summer of 1954 was a Sunday morning when the ex-Palestine policeman unlocked my cell and remarked, "Your fellows lifted several hundred rifles yesterday." I let out a delighted yell and almost hit the roof of the cell. The warden hurriedly backed out and locked the door again. After five minutes he returned and said, "I don't think I'll effing well tell you anything in future if you react like that."

"Well," I said, "it's the best news I've had for many a long day."

When I got over to the chapel Manus was there before me in the seat in front. I leaned over and whispered to him, "The boys got hundreds of rifles in a raid in the North yesterday."

His face lit up with local pride. "God," he said, "it must have been in Derry." But we duly heard that the raid had been on the British army depot at Gough Barracks in Armagh. Our comrades had pulled

off a daring operation in broad daylight. They had disarmed the sentry, taken over the barracks, cleared out the armoury and got away with almost three hundred rifles and fifty Stens and Bren guns. If our own raid on Felsted had ended successfully, with the weapons from that and Armagh combined, the Republican Army would be in a position where it could start moving into a campaign. But there would be more such operations. It was clear that a policy of action was now well under way, and our assessment was that after the next arms raid the beginning of the campaign would not be long delayed.

I got news of the next one in the same way. The ex-Palestine policeman unlocked the cell and told me there had been another raid in the North, though this time no arms had been captured. He gave me what details he had. The IRA had attacked another British barracks, this time at Omagh in Tyrone. There had been a gun battle in which five British soldiers were wounded. Eight of the Republicans had been arrested, and two of them were wounded.

These two operations acted as a great boost and swung a lot of people to the Republican movement. Writing to me later, Jimmy Steele of Belfast said, "Of course, it was Armagh and Omagh that shocked people out of their apathy and back to their true allegiance." At any rate, these raids caused quite a sensation and led to improvements in recruiting, funds and political interest in the movement's objectives.

Within the Scrubs, we encountered fresh resentment towards us after the Omagh operation, probably because of the British wounded. From the summer I had been receiving various Irish publications, including the Gaelic League paper *Rosc* and the *United Irishman*. After Omagh there was no sign of the latter, and we asked why. At dinner time one day the prison library officer came to my cell and said abruptly, "You're not allowed that paper any more. It's subversive."

But he was overruled by the governor, who told us, "I'm not going to prevent you receiving it provided you don't allow anyone else in the prison to read it. Now, boys, is that a bargain?"

Manus and I agreed. One of the POs in the office looked scandalised.

"But sir," he protested, "this paper is actually published by their organisation. It's subversive."

"Damn it, man," said the governor in his Oxford accent, "it won't make them any more subversive than they are already, will it?"

The PO went red in the face. Later that day the library officer came round, looking pretty choked as well. He threw that month's copy of the *United Irishman* into the cell and said, "I don't know what the Scrubs is coming to. If I had my way you wouldn't get this bloody rag." And he banged the door shut so hard that it echoed all over the wing.

In my thirteenth month of captivity, November 1954, my wife and I agreed that she should return to Ireland with the children. Up to then she had come in with one or both of my daughters every month. Now we decided it would be best if Mary took them to County Cork to grow up while she looked after her mother. There would not be enough money for Mary to travel over and see me from month to month. But we would save up for visits, and she would come to London every eight or nine months and stay for a while with her sister. During each of these trips there would be several opportunities for us to see each other again. I would miss her and the children badly, but I knew it was better for them to grow up in Ireland, where people would be more understanding about the fact that their father was a political prisoner.

And so, from then until my release, I watched my children grow up literally at a distance. During her visits to London my wife would stay several weeks and we would have eight or even ten chances to meet again. When you see children only every nine months or so you notice how big a difference there is in them on each occasion. They seemed to have grown enormously since the previous year. For the first one or two visits Máire and Catherine would be rather shy, but by the end of their stay they would be quite used to me again.

With my family back in Ireland, I concentrated as hard as I could on studying. Manus and I had put our first year to good use, as we had pledged ourselves. I had finished the book-keeping course and had started on the general accounting one. I had made excellent progress in Irish, largely due to our policy of using nothing else when we talked together. The first book I read right through in Irish was a life of John Mitchel, the Young Ireland leader of 1848, by Niall Ó Donaill, a native speaker from Donegal. Mitchel, of course, had himself written one of the classics of Irish prison literature, his *Jail Journal*. In English, I had already read the prison writings of O'Donovan Rossa, the Fenian leader, and those of Tom Clarke, whose revolutionary spirit and determination survived unbroken

through almost sixteen years of British imprisonment during which he saw his comrades going insane around him.

We felt ourselves to be part not only of the tradition of the Irish Republican jail fighters, but of the worldwide spirit of revolutionaries in prison. No matter how long they kept you locked in your cell, they could not make you afraid or alone. Hundreds of thousands of people have been imprisoned because of their beliefs or their desire to free their countries, whether from local dictators, Western imperialism or Eastern totalitarianism.

But it was not through imprisonment alone that we felt this sense of solidarity. We watched new anti-colonial movements growing in one place after another across the world, and knew that the same determination would rise again in Ireland. We followed these liberation struggles closely through the papers we received, through various overseas publications like *Time* and through other sources of information that found their way into the prison.

When the revolutionary forces in Vietnam captured the French military base of Dien Bien Phu, we were delighted, because we knew what it meant. The tide of history was beginning to turn, and the decaying colonial powers could not hope to brazen out humiliating military defeats like that for very long. Manus and I wanted to celebrate as we walked in the yard. All we had to give each other was a couple of bars of chocolate, and that was how we marked the victory of Dien Bien Phu. The colonial era appeared to be doomed, but it would not be finally destroyed without fierce fighting and bitter sacrifice.

In early January 1955 it became clear that the British would soon have their hands full somewhere else. We read that the caique *Saint George* had been intercepted and arrested by British naval vessels off Paphos, on the west coast of Cyprus. She was carrying a load of weapons, ammunition and explosives. A dozen men were on board, including Socrates Loisides, who was subsequently sentenced to twelve years' imprisonment. We were later to learn from people who had been on the *Saint George* herself that this was her second run, having already successfully landed an earlier cargo of arms in Cyprus. The following April EOKA launched its campaign to end British rule in Cyprus. And though we did not know it then, we were to become closely acquainted not only with some of the EOKA leaders, but with men who had made the very voyage that was now arousing our interest.

The struggle in Kenya touched us in a different way. We had read of the case of a British army captain, convicted there for torturing prisoners suspected to be members of the Kenya Land Army. He had been in command of a unit of African troops serving under the British against the guerrillas. His defence was that he had obtained valuable information by these methods. But there was something of a political outcry at the time about the torture and ill-treatment of Kikuyu prisoners and internees. It was believed that this captain had taken the can back for a number of high-ranking officers.

In due course, as things turned out, the torturer arrived as a prisoner in the Scrubs. We decided that, given the opportunity, we would give him a thumping. Unfortunately, when he and I came face to face I did not have the chance. It was in the library, where I was always accompanied by an officer who would take me from my cell, stand beside me while I selected my books and bring me back to be locked up again. Anyway, there was the cashiered torturer, looking a bit new and uncertain.

"I say, where does one pass these books out?" he asked me.

I felt a strong temptation to let him have it there and then, but with that prison officer beside me I could see my few precious privileges going up in smoke if I did. Instead I ignored the question and deliberately turned my back. The warder said nothing.

The ex-captain was eventually put to work in the tailor shop, and alongside Manus, of all people. After he had been there about an hour he put some question to Manus, who turned on him and said, "Don't speak to me, you dirty murderous bastard. If you do, I'll brain you with something. I want nothing to do with you." One of the officers in the shop overheard, and the hero from Kenya was shifted to another work position. Within a few weeks he was made a trustee and given a red band, which should have made things a lot easier for him.

But in fact, it didn't. He had a five-year sentence to serve, and he was serving every minute of it. As several other prisoners noticed and remarked to me, the ex-captain seemed very bitter about his comedown and was doing his time really hard. He was still like that months afterwards when they moved him to an open camp.

Though we had no pity for him, it is nonsense to pretend that the torture of prisoners for information can be carried out on a large scale in any campaign without the knowledge and sanction of senior officers. It had been proved in Ireland in the 1920s, it was being

proved in Kenya now, and it would be proved again in Cyprus, Aden, Algeria and Northern Ireland. Torture for information is a standard part of intelligence operations by colonial security forces. Officers who carried out such torture could not complain when they found themselves taking the rap for the higher-ups. Even a senior officer who gave the game away was taking a risk. When Brigadier-General Crozier resigned over the behaviour of the Auxiliaries in Ireland, he was blacklisted, hounded and persecuted by the establishment, which did everything possible to ruin his reputation and credibility.

Little did I know it in Wormwood Scrubs, but at that very moment another British captain in Kenya was beginning to devise a new theory of counter-insurgency. His name was Frank Kitson. He was to become our deadliest enemy in the North.

Chapter 5

The Prison Front

In the Republican movement, a political prisoner did not just vanish into jail to be forgotten. The jails and camps themselves were an important sector of the revolutionary front. One of the most effective ways of keeping political prisoners in the public eye was to nominate them as candidates in elections. Of the seventy-three Republicans elected to the first Dáil, forty-seven were in jail at the time. During the Tan war, a London weekly journal said, "The normal residence of an Irish member of parliament is a British prison."

Manus Canning's stock rose greatly in Wormwood Scrubs when it was learned that he had been nominated as the Sinn Féin candidate for his native Derry in the May 1955 general election for the Westminster parliament. Chris, a young Welshman serving a sentence for refusing his call-up to the British army, had also been nominated by Plaid Cymru, the Welsh Nationalist Party. Although we had an ex-MP inside with us as a prisoner, it was quite a novelty to have residents of C Wing actually standing for parliament. There were older warders, of course, who shook their heads and said they didn't know what the Scrubs was coming to.

In the event, Sinn Féin polled a big vote, and two Republican political prisoners in Crumlin Road jail in Belfast were elected to Westminster, an embarrassment for the British. As a "felon" could not be an MP, by-elections had to be held all over again. One of the seats had to be fought three times before the Nationalists finally split the vote and let a Unionist in. It all had the effect of focusing critical attention on the political set-up in the North which the British would much rather not mention.

The day after the elections I met Manus on the landing as we were going down to exercise. He was wearing a very long face.

"What's the matter?" I asked him.

"I got less than ten thousand votes," he said gloomily, showing me a telegram. Hugh McAteer, the last Republican to fight that seat, had received more than twenty-one thousand votes on the same ticket.

The mystery was eventually cleared up when we got hold of the newspapers and checked the figures. Manus had in fact polled nineteen thousand nine hundred and something votes. When his election agent had handed in the telegram in Derry, some Unionist supporter in the post office had probably turned the knife by leaving off the first figure.

Though Manus had been elected, we both did well out of the status he achieved in his brief run as candidate. We were allowed out every evening for an hour after tea. This welcome concession ended abruptly on August 14, a date I remember because it was my wedding anniversary. At six o'clock we heard news that there had been a raid on a British military installation at Arborfield, in Berkshire. Armed men had got away with large quantities of automatic weapons and ammunition. I regarded this as a first-class anniversary present, but the prison brass looked on it otherwise. Manus and I were told we would no longer be allowed out on evening association and the next day we were returned to D Wing. We did, however, gain another IRA comrade in the Scrubs — Donal Murphy, who had taken part in the Arborfield raid.

In the summer of 1956, rumours went around that prisoners were expected from Cyprus, where the resistance campaign had been in progress for well over a year. I had studied it as carefully as possible in the press.

We arrived back from the workshops one day to find that a new table had been placed next to the separate table recently allocated to the IRA prisoners. After we started our dinners, six men appeared at the new adjoining table and sat down. They were dark-skinned, rather good-looking and neat. When we finished eating, I turned to the man nearest to me and said, "Excuse me, do you speak English?"

"Yes," he replied.

"You are the EOKA prisoners?"

"We are."

"We are the IRA prisoners," I told him. The two of us shook

hands. Then we all got up, introduced ourselves and shook hands all round. We sat down in one group together.

They told us that two of them were students from Cyprus who had been at Athens University and had given up their studies to return and play leading parts in the struggle. Renos was the brother of the Bishop of Kyrenia. His comrade was called Petros. They had both been studying literature. These two young men were among the earliest group leaders appointed by the EOKA. Arrested early in the campaign, they were serving life imprisonment for possession of arms.

The others of the EOKA men were civil servants. George, born in Palestine, had worked in a government office and was a member of a sabotage group. He was one of the first EOKA people to be arrested and was serving only five years. Dimitrios, who came from Larnaka, had been employed in a Ministry of Defence military department and was serving a life sentence.

The remaining two of the original six, Cocos and Loisos, had just left secondary school, or *gymnasia*, in Famagusta. They were very good lads. The British had given them life sentences, too, for having arms.

This group was representative, I think, of the first people who joined EOKA — patriotic students, civil servants and shopkeepers. They had been transferred to England from Cyprus because they had been leading the campaign of defiance which the EOKA prisoners had been waging there. That campaign was in the same revolutionary tradition as the tactics of the Irish Republican jail fighters of the past. When you have numbers, you can accomplish a great deal, even in prison.

I noticed that the attitude of the Cypriots was identical to that of Manus and myself when we had first come into the Scrubs. They had decided on a policy of wait and see while they found their bearings, studied their surroundings and learned the routines. They asked several shrewd questions about how things went in prison, and we put them in the picture as fully as possible.

I left my accountancy studies to one side for a while and replaced them with long and deeply interesting discussions of revolutionary methods and military action with the EOKA men. Renos told me how he had been captured. One morning General Grivas, the EOKA commander, had a meeting between his headquarters group and a battle group led by Gregoriou Afxentiou on a mountainside above

the village of Splia. Renos, coming down into the village on reconnaissance, ran into two companies of British troops who looked as though they were starting an encirclement operation. He tried to break out to warn his comrades above, but he was shot, badly wounded and captured.

When Afxentiou heard the firing in the village, he said to Grivas, "Old man, go." The HQ group left, slipping away in the early morning mist. Afxentiou and his men kept track of the British as they worked their way up the mountainside. The two companies were some distance apart, apparently working as the two arms of a pincer movement. When they came within range, Afxentiou ordered his battle group to open up on them in both directions simultaneously with everything they had, including their Bren. The result was bedlam. Confused by the mist, the two companies engaged each other with heavy fire, mortars and bazookas. Afxentiou and his men withdrew quietly up the mountain, leaving the Brits to fight it out among themselves.

The battle lasted for an hour. Afterwards the British officially admitted that six of them had been wounded. The true casualties were in fact one hundred and four wounded, including a colonel. It took them all morning to straighten out the mess, get the wounded down from the mountain and arrange transport. There were plenty of opportunities to observe all this. In addition the Cypriots were able to get the real casualty figure from their own contacts in the hospitals.

Petros had been transferred to England after escaping twice from prison in Cyprus, and he wasn't long in the Scrubs before his thoughts began to turn in that direction once more. However, the opportunity did not arise for a while yet.

By the winter another nine EOKA fighters had been sent to Wormwood Scrubs. One of these was Socrates Loisides, the Greek Cypriot lawyer who had been in charge on the *Saint George* when the British captured her. Socrates had been a founder member of EOKA with Grivas. Highly respected by the other prisoners from Cyprus, he had been active in the anti-German underground in Greece during the occupation and had been in prison before.

There was a great reunion between Cocos and Loisos and some of this second group, who had been with them at the *gymnasia* in Famagusta. I became very friendly with one of them, called Epiphanios, because he was born on January 6, the same birthday as

one of my daughters. Another of the group was a professor of mathematics in his mid-forties, whom I also got along with very well. The rest were wonderfully mixed in their backgrounds. Andreas was a shepherd. There was a tiny shoemaker, hardly five foot tall, called Nicos the Small. This was to distinguish him from the other Nicos, who was younger and had been very badly wounded. Christofos was the manager of a small co-operative store.

Four of the new arrivals had been in the same rural unit of the EOKA together, operating against the British in the foothills of the Troödos mountains. I was embarrassed to learn that they would probably never have been in prison had it not been for a mercenary from County Mayo. In one operation they hit the British and killed two of them, then went to ground in a dugout they had under a farm building. They stayed there for two days, until troops of a British force searching the area discovered it. One of the soldiers – the Irishman – looked in, saw something and fired into the dugout. Thassos, the leader, was shot in the ear. The others were severely beaten up.

EOKA men continued to arrive, including the well known Nicos Samson. The British said he was responsible for operations which had caused the deaths of more than twenty of their men in Nicosia. In ordinary life Samson was a journalist. He and I didn't hit it off well at all, and I suppose many would just call it a personality clash. There were others among the EOKA prisoners just as tough as he was, but in a much quieter way. One was a very dedicated young man, a group leader. On his leadership's instructions he had executed two British army men in reprisal for the hanging of two EOKA fighters. The British hanged eight in all.

Our EOKA friends had their sad memories, and their defiant ones. All of them had been beaten or tortured for information, except George and Dimitrios. Two of the former *gymnasia* lads had been put sitting on blocks of ice, which can cause frostbite in the genitals with effects that can be imagined. To cover the cruder beatings, the British had extended to twenty-eight days the time a prisoner could be held before appearing in court. This gave time for facial bruises and marks to fade somewhat before he was produced.

They would go quiet and deadly whenever news reached the Scrubs that the British had hanged another EOKA prisoner. Whenever word of such an execution came in, they had a practice of going on hunger strike for forty-eight hours. On the next occasion, when three

condemned Cypriots were hanged, we of the IRA decided we would fast for the same period to demonstrate our solidarity with our revolutionary comrades of EOKA. We told the PO in D Wing that we would be going on the same protest as the Cypriots, no food for two days.

This provoked quite a reaction in the wing. During that forty-eight hours several warders took pleasure in making wisecracks to us. One of them, a Scot, came to my cell with cocoa one evening about half-past seven. When I refused he snapped, "For God's sake, cop yourself on and have sense. You're a sucker."

I told him that might be his opinion, but personally I was proud to associate myself with the action of the Cypriots. He went out and slammed the cell door as hard as he could. He and other warders would stand outside, expressing in very loud voices what they thought should be done with EOKA and ourselves.

As our friendship with the Cypriots took root, Manus and I decided we would try to learn some Greek. We were under the impression that it was a very difficult language. One of the literature students, Petros, agreed to give us lessons, and we were pleased to find that we picked up a fair amount of Greek quite quickly. Of course, we had the advantage of being with native speakers, and if we were stuck for a word or the correct pronunciation all we had to do was ask. We kept up these lessons for the next two years, until Manus and I were having half our conversations in Irish and the rest in Greek. I believe that Manus remains a good Greek speaker to the present. Mine is more rusty through lack of opportunity for conversation, but I still read Greek quite well.

I discovered one subject that the EOKA men seemingly didn't want to talk about much. As the campaign went on and I learned about it from our talks with them, it was clear that Grivas would not budge from his goal of *Enosis*, or unity with Greece. Archbishop Makarios, on the other hand, would be content with nominal independence which would leave the British quite an amount of control. This situation echoed the Republic-versus-Free State problem in Ireland in the 1920s, and seemed to contain similar dangers of dividing the national movement.

"What would happen if the people had to choose between Grivas and Makarios?" I asked them.

"It would never happen," they said loyally. But time proved otherwise.

On most other matters, however, they talked with a great deal of insight and experience. When I was released I had many detailed notes on EOKA revolutionary and guerrilla tactics, and I still have them.

The Cypriots mounted a hunger strike in 1957 in support of *Enosis* with Greece and to demand a hearing for their charges of torture after their arrest. After their two-day fast, they were told to go to their cells and collect their belongings. When we saw them coming downstairs with their things, we realised they were being moved to another prison, and we went forward to speak to them. Five or six prison officers immediately formed a line between us and said, "Sorry. We have instructions to prevent you talking to them. No contact."

The EOKA boys were taken out of the back door of D Wing and through a gate which was used only on this occasion the whole time we were in the Scrubs. Manus and I could only stand and wave goodbye to them, and shout to them in Greek, "We'll see you again some day."

That was the last we saw of our fellow revolutionaries. Ten of them were sent to Wakefield, where they came into contact with our IRA comrades. The other ten went to Maidstone.

We missed them in the prison. Many times in the years since I have thought of those EOKA men. We have occasionally been in contact with them. Petros Stilianou later sent me a pamphlet which he wrote about me and the other Republican prisoners he met during his time in prison.

But meanwhile things were moving forward in Ireland, too. In September 1956 one of us had a visit from a friend who, unknown to the authorities at the Scrubs, was attached to the IRA headquarters staff. He gave us a strong hint that a Republican campaign was now imminent. Our reaction was a combination of enthusiasm and frustration. This was what we had been waiting for. Now that it was near, there seemed to be very little chance that we would be able to take part in it.

We looked around at old escape plans that had not worked out and decided we would try to reactivate one of them. Through our line out of the Scrubs, we made contact with friends in London and arranged for a safe house which we intended to make for. But we

were unable to get in a particular device on which the escape plan depended. It was not available, and it was no use blaming our comrades outside. They had their hands full preparing for the new campaign. If we were going to get out we would have to manage it ourselves. But the security precautions around Manus and myself presented too many obstacles that we could just not overcome.

The campaign in the North opened on December 12, 1956. We heard most of the details from a warder before we got the newspapers. "You so-and-sos are getting too active," he said. "I can see that more of you are going to end up here." The campaign had certainly opened with a crash. There had been twelve or thirteen operations all over the North. In Enniskillen a territorial army barracks was blown up and almost destroyed, and in Derry a radio installation was wrecked. Quarries were raided and stocks of gelignite seized. Bridges were attacked, there was firing at Armagh Barracks and in the far north of Antrim, where an attack on a RAF radar station failed and three men were arrested.

After the first mixed reaction of satisfaction and frustration, we read the reports with a more critical eye and began to wonder why certain things had not been done. None of the Special Branch in the North had been eliminated. Anti-personnel attacks had been few. The number of operations in the opening phase did not amount to a severe blow at the occupation regime. However, it is easy to sit in prison and assess what should have been done. The columns that went out that night were operating in winter snow and sleet.

In January, the IRA blew up the territorial army barracks in Dungannon, destroying it almost totally. Plans for this attack had been captured earlier among documents in a raid in Dublin and already published in the papers. Other targets listed in captured documents were also hit successfully, and in spite of the renewed campaign, the occupation authorities in the North were apparently not yet on their toes.

But if they could not protect military and RUC targets, they could strike at the Republican movement in another way. Internment was introduced in the North in December, and this was followed in the new year by widespread arrests of Republicans both North and South.

The differences inside the Dublin coalition proved too much for it, and the government was brought down on a motion of no confidence by Seán MacBride, a former IRA Chief of Staff who had gone into

politics and become Minister for External Affairs. An election was held in March. Sinn Féin nominated nineteen candidates including, of course, a number of political prisoners.

Manus and I had divided opinions on this. In spite of increased public support for the movement and the rise in membership and subscriptions, I was convinced that it was a mistake to get involved on such a small scale.

Mary came over to visit me and said that she had helped to form a branch of Sinn Féin in northeast Cork and had worked in the election. She was disappointed because her candidate had got a good vote but was not elected. It was the same story in many other places. Sinn Féin in fact won four seats with nearly 66,000 votes, but this did not upset the power game of De Valera and the Fianna Fáil party. They had exploited the growing Republican feeling with their own well financed party machine and won the election with a comfortable majority.

This result confirmed my belief that a revolutionary organisation must be extremely careful about the timing of any involvement in parliamentary elections. Revolutionary political action is necessary. But it should not always include the contesting of elections, though there are times when it is advantageous to do so. The best strategy is to go all out in local elections, build up from that base and then wait until you can put enough candidates in a general election to give the people a clear choice between straight Republican and Free State policies.

The outcome of that 1957 election was that Fianna Fáil were installed in power for sixteen years. We knew, even from the Scrubs hundreds of miles away, what De Valera's return meant for our comrades in Ireland. The persecution of Republicans would now begin in earnest and collaboration with the British forces would be stepped up.

We did not have long to wait. In July internment was reintroduced in the South and there were big round-ups of Republicans. Practically the entire leadership of the movement was lifted. Manus and I were very despondent that people we had confidence in had been arrested again. We knew their absence would weaken the campaign in the North.

Time was flying by now. Almost before we knew it we were moving into our last year of imprisonment. Life had become much easier because of the vast improvements under the new governor,

Gilbert Hare, who had introduced a humane programme of reforms. Food, general conditions, educational facilities and entertainment were all far better. I had finished all three of my correspondence courses and had passed my examinations in accountancy. Friends outside paid for a fourth course which I took. It was in business organisation and methods and I passed the examination in this too. With an hour's television every night, the last twelve months were quite cushy. It enabled us to keep in touch with outside events much better.

For some time we had come across references to a band of guerrillas fighting the dictator Batista in Cuba. From various sources, particularly American news weeklies, we began to realise that this was an extremely efficient guerrilla campaign with a highly competent leadership. The name of Fidel Castro became familiar to us, though we still knew little about Che Guevara. From a map in one of these periodicals showing the area where Castro and his comrades were operating, I recognised the Sierra Maestra as the tall mountains I had watched ten years before as I sailed past them on my way back from the West Indies. It was hard to tell from reports at that time whether Castro and his movement were Marxist or not, and to be honest I didn't care.

In more personal terms, however, 1958 began badly for Mary and me. She had come over from Ireland again to see me towards the end of December. But I received word that she had been suddenly taken ill and was in hospital in London. Having given my word not to escape I was taken to visit her under escort.

I was led across to the reception block and given my own clothes. It was the first time I had put them on in almost five years. A young Scots warder wanted to handcuff me, but I protested that I had given my parole to the chief officer and intended to keep it. After a bit of discussion, it was agreed that I need not be handcuffed. I was put into a car and driven across west London to the hospital.

Mary looked very shaky. She had developed peritonitis after a minor operation. To add to our anxieties, I learned that our little girls, who were staying with Mary's sister, had been knocked down by a car in London. They were both shaken but not injured, though Catherine had been kept in hospital overnight for observation.

My wife and I had two hours together. She soon began to improve and came out of hospital in March. But it was not until May that she felt well enough again to return to Ireland.

From what I could glimpse of the streets on the way back to Wormwood Scrubs, London had changed a good deal since 1953. Everything looked a lot flashier, more American almost. But they could have it. I wouldn't be long in London when they let me out. All I wanted was to get to Ireland, back together with Mary and the girls.

In October 1958 Cathal Goulding was sent to Wormwood Scrubs to finish off his sentence. He was now due for release two months after us, having lost remission for an escape attempt. He was a great prison comrade who shared anything he had with you without being asked for it.

At the beginning of 1959, with only a few more weeks to serve, I had to decide where I would go. Séamus McCollum, a Liverpool Irishman arrested in 1954, had returned to Ireland after serving his sentence, but had been re-arrested there and interned in the Curragh. Would I be picked up and given the same treatment when I stepped off the boat?

However, events in Ireland moved ahead of me. The Dublin government was not enjoying the international publicity its internment policy had received thanks to various cases which had been taken to the European Court of Human Rights. And whatever about pleasing the British, internment did not go down at all well in America, where Fianna Fáil was trying to attract dollar investment for Ireland.

In the new year internees began to be released in batches, and there were strong indications that the Curragh would soon be closed down altogether. What may have hastened De Valera's decision was the political uproar that arose in England around this time over internment in Kenya. Eleven prisoners had been beaten to death in the terrible Hola camp. Within twelve days of that shocking affair, the Curragh internment prison was emptied and the gates closed.

Just before our release fell due, we were taken round to the photographer. We managed to wet our faces, so that the pictures would come out dark and patchy. If they were not in any particular hurry, there was a good chance that we would be on our way before they discovered this. We were well aware of how photographs taken by British authorities appeared in Special Branch files in Dublin. In the opposite direction, police photographs of Republicans taken in Dublin had already appeared outside RUC barracks in the North. But

the pictures were printed before we left. As soon as they found they were no good, they photographed us again, this time with a couple of warders keeping a close eye on us.

On our last day but one in the Scrubs we had to go before the board that had questioned us on the day after our arrival. The system had not changed. Prisoners just beginning their sentences stared enviously at us as we were taken in. The board asked me where I was going.

"Ireland," I said. They told me I was entitled to a suit of clothes, a railway warrant and five pounds. I said I did not want any of these concessions.

"But you must take it," said one of the members, a Church Army representative.

"If he doesn't want to, he doesn't have to," Gilbert Hare, the governor, said shortly.

On the last morning Manus and I were unlocked at half-past six and quickly got our books and other belongings together. We said a hasty goodbye to Donal Murphy and Cathal Goulding. There was some of our other property in store in the reception block. Among it I found books and letters that I had waited for but which had never been issued.

The steward in the Chief Officer's office gave us our money, which had been either sent in or on us when we arrived.

"There's one other formality before you go," the Chief said. "I have to read the provisions of the Firearms Act to you." Afterwards he got us to sign a document confirming that he had read the relevant sections to us. Considering the charge under which we had come to be in prison in the first place, we had to laugh, but the Chief went solemnly through the whole rigmarole.

When he had finished, we went out of the office and over to the gate. It opened for us, and we stepped out of the Scrubs.

Chapter 6

Homecoming

I left for Ireland on the same day that I was released from Wormwood Scrubs. Having said goodbye to Manus Canning near Knightsbridge, I went to Euston to take the evening boat train. A large party of friends, most of them in the Republican movement, came to the station to see me off. Crossing the Irish Sea, I spent a considerable part of the cold, clear February night on deck until at last, long before we landed, I was able to see the lights of Dublin Bay.

On coming ashore I kept a wary eye out for any surveillance, and again when I reached Westland Row station. But there was no interference. There was just time to make a quick shopping trip to O'Connell Street to buy some presents for Mary and my daughters before catching the Cork train. It was only when I was sitting down, looking out at the pleasant scenery on the way south, that I was really able to grasp that I was free.

Getting out at Mallow I looked around. Then I saw my wife and the two girls waiting. I had not seen them since the previous May. As I went to embrace them, something strange happened. I suddenly felt frozen, absolutely emotionless.

"What's wrong?" Mary asked. I wasn't able to move.

"I'll be OK in a minute," I told her. And the feeling passed. It had been a remarkable experience, and I have never had one like it since.

We took a taxi to my wife's place in Castletownroche. All that day people called at the house, coming in to shake hands and welcome me home. In the evening there was a big Republican torchlight procession headed by a couple of bands, the first in the village since Tom Hunter came home in the 1920s after the civil war. It marched

to the square, where I was asked to address a public meeting with four or five other speakers. Again the night was cold and sharp, and I was to speak last. It was icy up there on that platform, but the orator I was to follow got carried away and went on for forty minutes. We almost tugged the coat-tails off him before he stopped.

When I rose I was given a tremendous reception and soon forgot the cold in a vigorous speech, pointing out that although I and some others had been released there were still four hundred men in prison for Ireland. The finest thing we could do was what they themselves wanted, to continue the work of ending British power and influence in Ireland. On that same night I took the opportunity of reporting to the movement. That done, I felt in good form, and we wound up with an enjoyable céilí organised by Sinn Féin in the local hall.

During the first few days I noticed that little Máire was rather cool towards me. Finally she said, "I don't think you're my father at all. My father's in England."

She had been only seven months old when I was arrested. She probably didn't recognise me out of prison clothes. However, after a week or ten days she accepted me and her shyness wore off.

On the following Sunday I started to pick up the threads of political work again. I decided to go out with a few local Republicans pushing the national protest petition, just launched by the leadership, calling for the unconditional release of all political prisoners. A copy of the petition form was delivered to each household, and everybody over twenty-one was asked to sign it. Of about two hundred forms we had distributed in the area, almost one hundred and ninety had signatures calling for the release of our comrades.

However, I quickly found that support for the Republican movement in the area was not as strong as I had thought it would be, considering the strides it had made in 1957. Mary told me that sales of the *United Irishman* had fallen again after the general election and De Valera's return to power. These sales were always a good barometer of support in a given area. One thing that had not decreased, however, was public support for the Republican Prisoners' Dependants Fund. It has always been a feature of Irish attitudes that while backing for the revolutionary movement may ebb and flow at different times, people's sympathy for Republican prisoners and their families is constant.

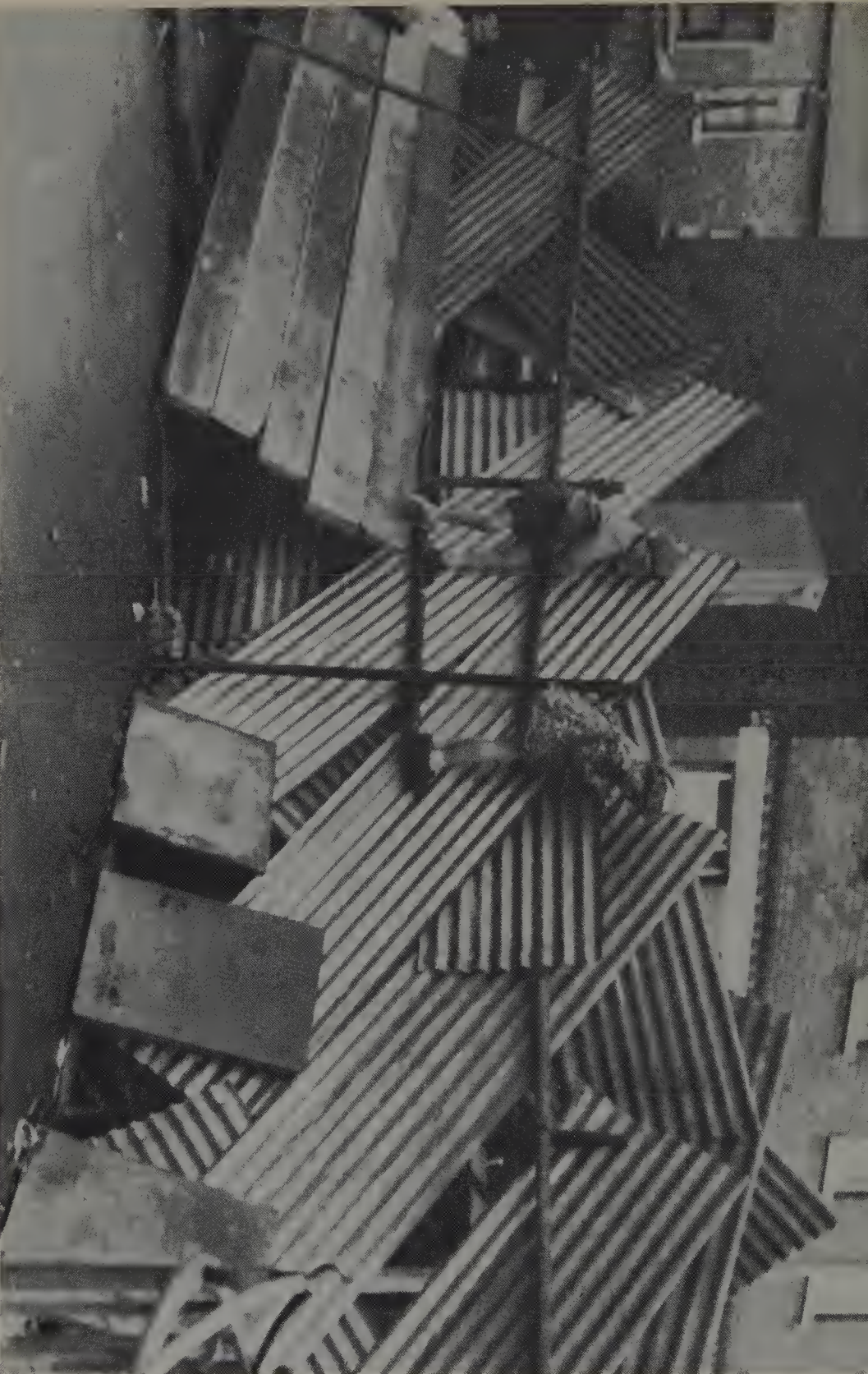
A few weeks after coming home I went to Cork City to query my position with the local leadership. I was to be given extended leave of



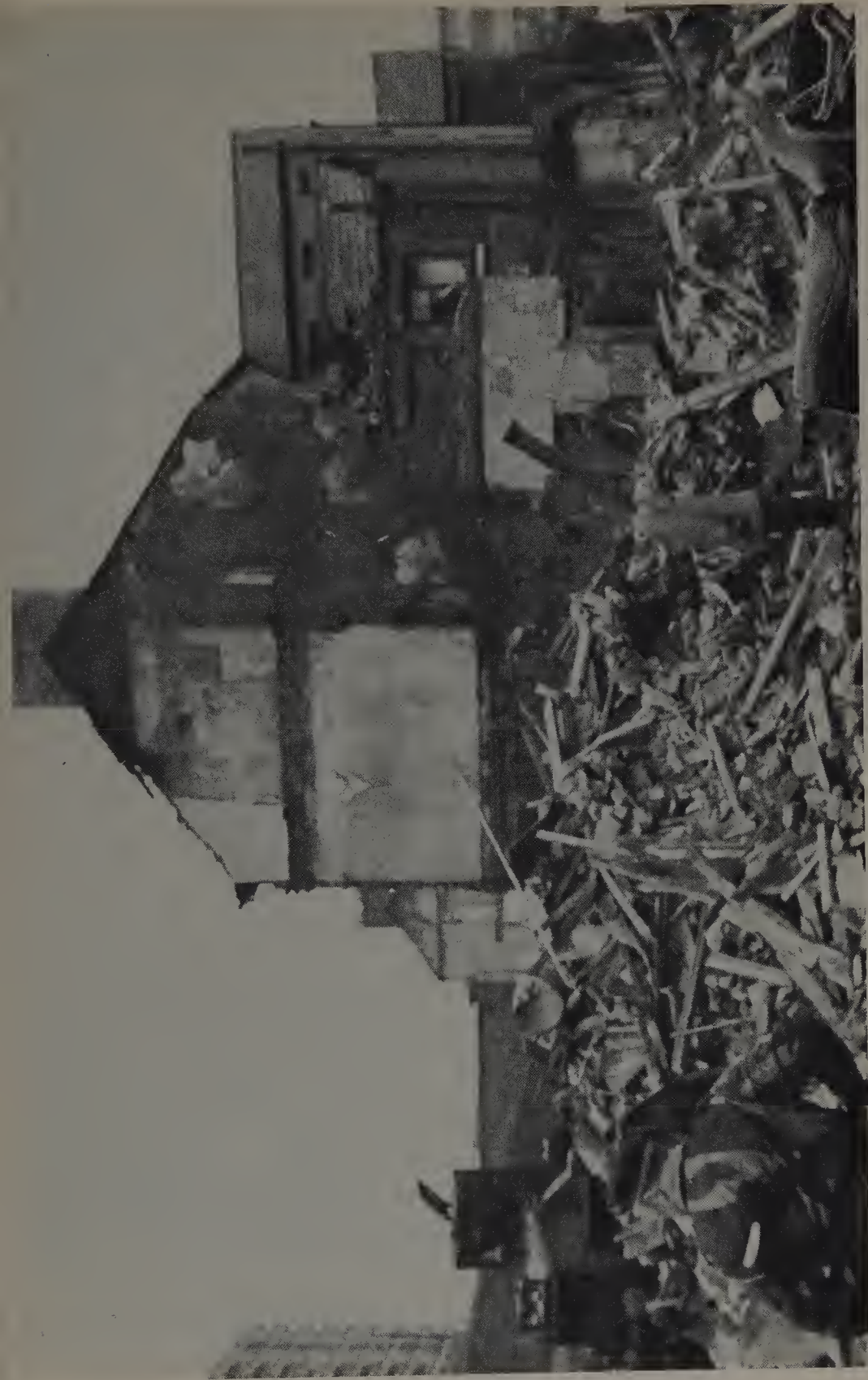
Seán MacStiofáin at the Hendon RAF Station, 1948.



Two of the annual photographs of Catherine and Máire, MacStiofáin's two children, sent to him by his wife Mary while he was imprisoned in Wormwood Scrubs. Left: the first sent in 1953. Right: the last sent in 1958.



Children playing on civilian barricades in Belfast. These barricades protected the "no-go" areas which were inaccessible to the British army. (*Syndication International*)



Aftermath of the bomb blast at McGurk's bar in Belfast and in which fifteen people died. Responsibility for the blast has never been established. (*Syndication International*)



An IRA reconstruction of the hooded treatment used by the British on the Irish internees in 1971. The treatment of internees was later the subject of wide protest.

absence. So, at the beginning of March 1959, I began looking for employment.

On my next visit to the city I heard that the prominent Republican Tomás MacCurtain, son of the murdered Lord Mayor of Cork, had been released from the Curragh and was arriving on the evening train. If they were releasing former leaders, I knew they must have decided to end internment in the South altogether. And in fact, within a fortnight, they did so. This step was bitterly condemned by the Unionist government in the North where detention without trial was to continue for a further two years, until April 1961.

While in Cork on that second occasion I was invited to speak at the annual Easter Sunday commemoration ceremonies at the end of the month. In my speech I said that the campaign in the North should go on, and that on no account should the movement call it off. At that time HQ was in favour of continuing, but the local leadership in Cork was cool towards the policy. After the speech, some of the senior people seemed rather distant.

However, I had other things to think about. After a couple of months I succeeded in obtaining employment. I was offered a job as a garage storeman at Cappoquin in County Waterford. Though I had never been in a garage store in my life, I was quite confident that with my RAF training and the know-how I had picked up through studying office management and accountancy in Wormwood Scrubs, I could handle the work. I had no difficulty sorting things out and setting up a regular stores procedure, and I enjoyed the work.

The only difficulty was the pay. Comparatively, I was quite well paid for that type of work in rural Ireland in 1959, but by the time the rent and bills were taken care of and Mary had her housekeeping money there was very little left. But we did have a fairly nice house to ourselves. It would have cost a hundred and fifty pounds to bring our own furniture from London when Mary had first moved back to Ireland, so she had been forced to sell it. She had kept that money aside. Now, with a bit more we had together, we were able to refurnish on a strictly utility budget and start a new home.

That spring Tomás MacCurtain and I travelled up to Dublin with our wives for a reception to welcome Cathal Goulding back from prison. Cappoquin was not far from the Waterford Gaeltacht, the area around Ring inhabited by native Irish speakers. This was my first visit to a Gaeltacht district. While I was there I was taken for a Scot, because of the Ulster Irish I had learned from Manus Canning, and

probably my accent. But the people there understood me all right. And, what was even more important to me, I understood them. I used to come to Ring at weekends and, when I could manage it, on my midweek half-day.

It was a wonderful summer. I used to cycle over or even walk to Ring on the fine sunny days. It was great to be at liberty and in the countryside again in weather like that.

While in Cappoquin, I found myself quite in demand as a public speaker. I travelled around a good deal to various events in County Cork and other parts of Munster, speaking on behalf of the movement at meetings and rallies in support of the Northern campaign or at protests organised by the national leadership.

But Mary and I were not destined to stay long in the house we had at Cappoquin. In September 1959 I was offered work much closer to my heart than the motor industry. It was a job with Gael Linn, the Irish language promotional organisation, in Cork City. Though the tasks involved were rather menial, I didn't mind. The pay was better, and in the city I could be of more use to the movement. Occasional public speaking and distributing handouts was all very well, but in the country I had been cut off from serious revolutionary activity for seven months, and I wasn't too happy about it.

As soon as my family and I had moved to the city I contacted the local Republican leadership once more. Again I was told to wait. I decided to report back every week in the hope they would start feeling guilty and give me something worth doing. But several weeks went by and still nothing happened.

Eventually I had a hell of an argument with the local commander and demanded to know what was going on.

He was quite evasive and it was obvious that he was trying to put me off. He knew my views on the Northern campaign. Finally, he asked if I would parade with a section, and I accepted.

Like Republican units in any part of Ireland, this one was made up of lads from several different walks of life and of various personal types. We had a couple of university students. We had craftsmen, artisans and labourers. Some of them, in spite of having only a little formal education, were well able to express themselves and argue their points quite articulately. Others, though very good workers and oozing with sincerity, had difficulty in communicating things they actually felt quite deeply.

Eventually I was asked if I would take over the section myself. I

agreed and immediately began to work out a proper training programme that would retain the interest of the young volunteers. I decided that in all of the section's activities I would try to provide an outlet for discussion, so that any misapprehensions could be cleared up. This turned out well, and we all developed a good, close working relationship. "Just do what you're told" may be the motto in conventional armies, but it is a useless principle in a revolutionary volunteer force where idealism and discipline have to be very carefully integrated.

By the summer of 1960 the friction between headquarters and the Cork City leadership came to a head over their opposition to continuing the Northern campaign. They were removed and I was asked to take over the Cork unit. It was not an easy task by any means and I got no assistance or co-operation from my predecessors. It was soon seen that I was putting my back into it, and the situation slowly rectified itself. But because of my unwavering support for HQ policy, some coolness remained.

When I had first come from London to march at Bodenstown in the early 1950s, I little thought that one day it would be I who would make the key annual oration there, setting forth the policy for the year ahead. But that summer it fell to me to do so, and my prison comrade Manus Canning was the chairman. I publicly supported the national leadership's decision to continue the campaign and called for an all-out effort by every Republican. On the social side, I compared the measly half-crown increase in old-age pensions just conceded by Fianna Fáil with the hundreds of thousands of pounds a year it was spending on collaboration with England to safeguard the North as a colony. In 1960 I was one of the few in the movement to link the social and national issues in a public policy declaration. At that time, very little was heard on such subjects from those who have since become obsessed with social agitation at the expense of revolutionary military activity.

Shortly after this, Manus told me he was going to the United States to live. I was very sorry to hear this personal decision of his, for he was a loss to the Republican movement, and indeed to Ireland.

In August 1961 it was necessary for me to obtain a few months leave from the IRA. My family and I hadn't recovered financially from the effects of my almost six years of imprisonment, and we were seriously handicapped by the high rent we were paying for a furnished house, the only accommodation available when we moved

to Cork. What furniture we had acquired in Cappoquin had to go into storage, and our financial position, instead of improving, had been gradually getting worse. I realised I would have to make a big effort to put my personal affairs straight once and for all. Then I would be in a position to resume my service with the movement without unduly neglecting my family responsibilities. This I did by taking on two part-time jobs, which naturally left me with no spare time whatsoever. A local man was ready to take over the Cork unit from me for my period of absence, and I was still on leave when the campaign was called off in February 1962.

I heard the news on the radio one night. Within half an hour people started coming to my house looking for my views on this decision. I assured them that the national leadership would not have ended the campaign if there had been a chance of carrying on with any hope of success.

But again dissatisfaction broke out among Republicans in Cork, and a new OC was appointed. When I reported back after my leave of absence expired, I was included in the new leadership there. Pessimists were already saying that it would be at least fifteen to twenty years before an armed struggle could be launched again in Ireland. But I threw myself back into work, trying to reorganise and build things up once more.

Apart from the men who had been released from the internment camps, there were still more than two hundred Republicans in prison, North and South, at the end of the campaign. When both the Dublin and Belfast governments refused to free them, the movement organised an international protest in Ireland, England and the United States. Once again De Valera and his party felt embarrassed by this and they grudgingly announced the release of Republican prisoners from Mountjoy. Many others continued to be held in Northern and English jails, and a great deal of energy and pressure was still required to keep up our effort to have them freed.

Other outrages were also being practised upon the people of the North. Unemployment there had reached the highest rate on either side of the Irish Sea, while a Tory government was boasting that the British had "never had it so good" and affluence was the political catchword of the day. In a largely Catholic town like Newry, for example, the unemployment rate for men in the early 1960s was no less than twenty-five per cent. British neglect over more than forty years was at last producing a build-up of resentment that would eventually explode.

I considered it essential for Republicans from the South of Ireland to acquaint themselves as fully as possible with the North. Throughout the 1960s Mary and I spent every bit of time we could in the North — our summer holidays, occasional Easters, and after we moved up to County Meath, as many weekends as possible. In the early autumn of 1962 I travelled there widely, studying conditions and meeting people.

I not only got to know the main highways in the North but learned my way around the back roads and the unbeaten tracks in remote parts of the country. This would all be useful later.

By then there were eighty or so men still held in Crumlin Road, and two or three in England. Since my own release I had written a number of articles about Donal Murphy and Joe Doyle, who were still serving life sentences for the Arborfield raid. I had made approaches to some well placed contacts I had got to know, including the Archdeacon in Cork, the late Canon Duggan. Although he did not approve of force, he was a powerful friend to the Republican prisoners. In one case he even arranged an unheard-of parole for a prisoner in the North, to come south for his father's funeral and then return. I have no doubt that it was the Archdeacon's tireless work behind the scenes that ultimately secured the release of Donal Murphy after he had served seven years of a life sentence, and of Joe Doyle a few months later.

We formed a Cork branch of the Republican Prisoners' Release Committee, and I became secretary. It operated on two levels. On the public side, we held protest marches and meetings, advertised and ran a press publicity campaign. But we also lobbied and made private overtures to various influential people, either directly or through their friends. We got resolutions pressing for early releases passed by various public bodies. Gradually the sustained pressure of these tactics throughout the country took effect, and by the end of 1963 the Republican prisoners in Belfast were released, in many cases long before their sentences were up.

Great changes came in the movement following the end of the 1956–62 campaign. First, there were rumours of dissension at the top, largely based on disagreements arising from the campaign itself. Some of the older men who had been members of the leadership at the time of my arrest in England resigned or were dismissed, and Cathal Goulding was appointed national leader. Down in the South, I had kept well clear of these high-level conflicts over policy. In my view, the most important priority was to get on with reorganising

and rebuilding the revolutionary potential, and I slogged away at this in Cork and Kerry, gradually feeling that I was getting worthwhile results. I was pleased by Goulding's appointment. I was confident that he would make a really militant leader and that we would get things done.

By 1964, however, it was apparent that some of the new leadership were heading off in a very different direction. They were becoming obsessed with the idea of parliamentary politics and wished to confine the movement almost entirely to social and economic agitation. It went without saying that agitation on social and economic issues was part of the struggle for justice. But I believed that we should not allow ourselves to get so committed to it that we would lose sight of the main objective, to free Ireland from British rule. It was British domination which had led to many of the abuses and injustices that called for social agitation.

The worrying signs inside the movement soon developed into an unmistakable programme. In that year an internal commission produced a document which sought to modify Republican attitudes on several vital matters. It contained nine proposals, the most important of which was to abolish the traditional policy of parliamentary abstentionism, on which the entire Republican position rested. Instead, it advocated that Republican candidates, if elected, would henceforth take their seats in the Dublin, Stormont and Westminster parliaments.

The document was circulated to all units. Special parades were called to discuss it and elect delegates to an Extraordinary Convention called to deal with the proposals. But every unit in my area was already against them.

In time of peace the organisation meets in a convention every two years. When in session, the convention is the supreme authority of the movement. Apart from dealing with policy and adopting or rejecting resolutions of that nature, one of its main functions is to elect a leadership. Those who attend the convention are delegates who have themselves been elected to represent Republican units all over Ireland. At the end of the convention, the delegates elect an Executive of twelve. These twelve then retire to a private room and elect a Council of seven. The Council finally elects an active volunteer as Chief of Staff, or national leader.

At this convention I and many others opposed the nine proposals head-on. We defeated the key proposal on the abstentionist issue by

a large majority. The strong line I took was, I am sure, largely responsible for my being elected to the national leadership at the end of the convention.

I was hoping against hope that I and some others on the Council would be able to persuade the rest that they were wrong to keep pushing the new line. But it was optimistic to expect that a clash could really be avoided. It came at the very first Council meeting I attended. I knew where some of the new influence was coming from. A Marxist whom I knew to be Moscow-oriented, and who had been in the CPGB and the Connolly Association, had returned to Ireland and was now a member of the Republican movement. I had no objection to him on personal grounds, but I pointed out that there was a clause in regulations forbidding membership to communists. When I proposed, with a certain amount of support, that his membership be withdrawn in the interests of the organisation, I ran into my first head-on row with Cathal Goulding. He retorted bluntly that if the individual in question went, he would go too.

It is never pleasant to come to a showdown with somebody of whom you have always thought highly. I had welcomed Goulding's appointment as a real step forward. Nevertheless, friction continued between us from the early part of 1965. It was invariably confined to policy, and my working relationship with him was good otherwise. We did our various jobs to the best of our ability, but it disturbed me that we were wasting so much time arguing over these differences when we should have been steadily building up our revolutionary potential.

Some of the older Republicans, who had been with the movement for years and still had years of service to contribute to it, began to drop away in disgust and protest.

I was not against social and economic agitation on a proper basis. In County Cork in the mid-'sixties, a situation arose which gave me the chance to implement some of my personal ideas. The Earl of Midleton, who virtually owned the town of Midleton, announced that the town was to be sold. We had a series of meetings with the Republicans in East Cork, and it was unanimously decided that we would oppose by any means we could the sale of an Irish town over the heads of its inhabitants, who had not even been consulted. This was the kind of reality that lay underneath the pretence of independence in the Irish Free State. Dozens of towns and hundreds of villages were virtually owned by single landlords, many of them

absentees who did not even live in Ireland. Of those who did, practically all had inherited these lands as descendants of English adventurers who had been given title to them by the British crown as rewards for services rendered in the occupation of Ireland.

The Republican movement intervened in Midleton. When the first group of houses was put up for auction several of us, myself included, picketed the proceedings. Some of the more money-minded residents did not take too kindly to our action. Nor did many less well-off people who did not fully understand what was going on or why we should take a hand. They understood all right a few weeks later, though. The earl's estate, including most of the town, was sold to a firm of speculators who informed all tenants that there would be heavy increases in their rents. What was more, leaseholders were told that leases would not be renewed unless on far more expensive terms, and ground rents would be put up too.

Rather late in the day, the people of Midleton realised why we had stood out against the sale of their town, and a good deal of opinion now swung over to us. Local committees including Republicans were formed, and we maintained our agitation until the property speculators eventually agreed to tone down their demands considerably. The dispute ended in a more or less fifty-fifty situation, but the intervention of the Republican movement was now seen as successful and in the public interest.

There was nervousness that spring about the possibility of large-scale Republican action on the fiftieth anniversary of the Rising, but it was confined to the North and by no means was all of it genuine. McConnell, the Stormont Minister for Home Affairs, claimed to have evidence that the IRA was planning something big. Intensive security precautions were ordered, and the border was sealed. The B-specials always approved of intensive security precautions, because they then had a chance to draw more pay.

Much of this fear, however, was in fact prompted by Loyalist factions which used the anniversary year as an excuse to form their own extremist organisation, the Ulster Volunteer Force. The people they were really afraid of were Terence O'Neill and Harold Wilson. O'Neill, the Northern premier, they saw as a weak man who was willing to deal with Dublin and might give in to pressure from London. Wilson and his Labour government had just won the 1966 election and might start looking at the number of Tories automatically elected to Westminster from gerrymandered constituencies

in the North. The two factors together were seen as a threat by the Loyalist extremists, and yet neither offered any real prospects of equal rights for the Nationalist minority.

The Ulster Volunteer Force mounted its first provocation in Belfast when, on April 16, it shot up the house of John McQuade, a right-wing Unionist MP, creating the impression that the attack had been carried out by the IRA. Soon the provocations increased. There had already been a series of petrol-bomb attacks on Catholic premises. In the first week of May a badly aimed bomb hit the wrong house and an unfortunate Protestant woman was burned to death. A judge found that the UVF was responsible and was carrying out acts of terrorism with the aim of "maintaining the Protestant ascendancy."

A fortnight later the UVF announced that it had "declared war" against the IRA. It added, "Known IRA men will be executed mercilessly and without hesitation." Leo Martin, a leading Belfast Republican, learned that they were trying to locate him and kill him. He and his family moved out of their house in a mixed Catholic-Protestant area. A four-man UVF assassination squad looked for him one night, and when they failed to find him they killed an absolute stranger named John Scullion. On June 25 they tried for Leo Martin again, but once more drew a blank. Instead, they ambushed four Catholic barmen leaving the Malvern Arms public house, shot one dead and seriously wounded two. Next day, Stormont banned the UVF and three of its members were arrested. They were sentenced to life imprisonment for the murder of Peter Ward, the young barman, with a recommendation that they serve a minimum of twenty years. Among them was "Gusty" Spence, the Belfast shipyard worker who was described as the "colonel" of the UVF in the Shankill area. The Malvern Street murder in 1966 was the act that really began the great confrontation in the North, though the crisis point was not reached for quite a while yet.

Around this time I was offered a transfer of employment which would mean leaving Cork and moving up the country. I now had a fairly good job as a full-time organiser for a fund-raising group attached to the Gaelic Athletic Association. With this transfer I would have a large area near the border to cover in north Leinster and south Ulster, including Cavan and Monaghan. I jumped at the opportunity. We rented a house up in Meath and moved there in July of 1966.

Meanwhile my relations with some of the leadership had continued to deteriorate, owing to the same basic differences over policy. The situation ultimately came to a head over a letter to the *United Irishman*. Written by Dr Roy Johnston, it criticised the custom of reciting the rosary at Republican commemorations, labelling it a sectarian practice. The real target of this Marxist criticism was not sectarianism, but religion as such. Apart from that, it was offensive and unrealistic to start dictating to Irishmen of any denomination how they ought to pray, if they wanted to. Even the most bigoted old colonel in the British army would have thought twice before causing trouble in his unit over such an issue.

My immediate preoccupation was to minimise as far as possible indignation among the membership in my own area, at that time still Cork and south Kerry. I took the step of stopping distribution of that edition of the paper over as wide a sector as I could, and I encouraged Republicans in at least two other regions to do likewise. They realised, as I did, that the letter could do quite a lot of harm. It didn't seem to have occurred to the editor of the *United Irishman* that he was handing our enemies a useful propaganda opening, and I faulted him severely for publishing it and then refusing to print the replies which I and a number of others had written.

When I reported my action in stopping the circulation of the paper in my area, I was given an order to get it sold. This order was carried out, inasmuch as my own people were told that HQ had countermanded my instructions. Next I was called to Dublin and informed by one of the Council that I had been suspended for six months. I asked whether any action was being taken against the editor and was told there was not. I had a few hot words with one person, pointing out that my action was justified and, in any case, it did not warrant a long suspension. I sent in a written appeal against the length of my suspension and it was eventually reduced to two months. Cathal Goulding had nothing to do with this episode. He had just been released from prison in the South after being picked up the previous February and held by a process of repeated adjournments of his case.

To give Roy Johnston his due, he felt that the letters we had written in reply to his should have been published, and in the long run most of the leadership came to see that the decision to raise the issue at all had been a bad mistake. However, as I was suspended from active membership of the revolutionary organisation, I auto-

matically forfeited my position in the leadership, both on the twelve-man Executive and on the seven-man Council. I was not particularly worried, because the convention was due to meet again that year and I was confident I would be returned to the leadership.

Chapter 7

Chief of Intelligence

In the autumn of 1966, at the next Army convention, I was re-elected to the leadership. At the top level of the organisation, therefore, three of us were against the new proposals to divert the IRA into the never-never land of theoretical Marxism and parliamentary politics. Three others were in favour of them. The seventh member, the chairman of the Army Council, maintained an ambiguous position on this issue, and kept it up for the next three years.

With my suspension behind me, I took fresh heart from the support of the volunteers who had voted me back. The more or less even division of views in the leadership did not genuinely reflect feeling in the Army itself. Almost two-thirds of the delegates had voted against these policies of drift when they were first put forward, and even more at the next convention. I hoped now that a new start would be possible, and that the Republican movement would regain its old unity and set about the task of building up its military efficiency.

The earlier friction had worried me. Now that Cathal Goulding and I were working closer together, I cherished the belief that we might be able to iron out our differences. I approached him with this in mind, explaining that I would not be able to work at top effectiveness with those who supported the controversial proposals. I would be very relieved if at least he and I could arrive at an understanding. We began rationally enough but ended up in a heated argument.

That was the first of several approaches I made to Cathal between 1966 and 1969, but there was no progress to be made in influencing

him away from the line he had chosen. Our arguments did not arise from a power struggle, and they certainly did not come from any personality clash. They were the hardest kind of all to settle, because they were directly caused by a conflict of principle.

At the same time, I was being approached by some who hoped I would abandon my own philosophy of revolutionary military activity and transfer my support to them. My practice when this happened was simply to listen in silence until they had put all their arguments, then respond with mine. After five or six such approaches, these attempts to convert me were seen to be fruitless, and each group stuck to its own position.

Despite all this, it was more important than ever to get on with the real work of the movement. The North went on showing clear signs of coming trouble. O'Neill had not got rid of the threat from the Loyalist extremists by declaring the Ulster Volunteer Force an illegal organisation. The Stormont premier was a man in a trap. If he did not make a move to abolish discrimination against Catholics, he faced their rising anger. If he did, he faced the certainty that Paisley and the extreme right-wing elements would go all out to bring him down.

When I returned to HQ after my period of suspension in the autumn, I was put in charge of Republican intelligence. I willingly accepted the new appointment and got down without delay to a preliminary survey of how matters stood in this branch of the movement.

I cannot convey my amazement when the intelligence files were handed over to me. It took me about two days to go through them. My comment was, "Ninety per cent rubbish, five per cent of historical interest and five per cent useful material." When I stared at the small pile of what had been worth saving, it didn't seem much of a basis for a modern intelligence branch. I had taken on a task that would tax me to the limit if it were done properly.

For a good many years, of course, and particularly in peacetime, intelligence had been the Cinderella of the Republican Army. Many IRA intelligence officers at that time had little or no experience of this kind of work. Somebody from Headquarters would go down to a local unit with a questionnaire and ask the OC, "Have you got an intelligence officer?" Frequently they wouldn't have, and the HQ man would say, "Well, the vacancy has to be filled. You'll have to appoint someone." Under this kind of pressure, the local OC would

oblige by allocating the job to anybody he could get to take it. The person in question was just shown on the paper strength of the unit as intelligence officer. Generally he would do no real intelligence work at all.

I got through my preliminary survey soon after taking over and did a complete review of the IRA intelligence structure. I produced a report for the Chief of Staff and handed it to him, retaining a copy myself. It was well received, but it did not excite any great comment. To my mind, this attitude on the part of HQ was one that could work both ways, and I took it as clearance to go ahead and sort out the situation myself.

I made several decisions. First, I would concentrate personally on the North. I believed that by handling the North myself, practically living with the IOs there, I could impress on them the urgency of our work. Second, I would implement a training programme for intelligence personnel including the production of an intelligence manual, the first to be issued in the movement for many years. Other important decisions were taken at this time.

I tried various methods to get everyone working in the right way and to involve the smartest and most energetic people in intelligence activity. But this was anything but easy in peacetime. I had started off, moving extensively through the North, by meeting the battalion intelligence officers to explain what I was up to and to secure their co-operation. At the very outset, I found that the unmilitary ways of the leadership were taking their toll of efficiency.

My first meeting with a battalion IO was arranged for two pm on a Sunday afternoon. When I arrived on the dot, the man almost collapsed with shock.

"We were not expecting you for at least another hour," he said.

"Our appointment was for two o'clock," I told him.

"That's right", he answered. "But we never expect HQ officers on time."

Whatever about other people, I said, I would be punctual and insisted on punctuality from people working with me. I found the same problem in other places and made the same sharp remarks. But I was glad to find that Belfast was on its toes. In its keenness regarding intelligence, it was the exception. Even in 1966 there was a good battalion IO there, with a smart team. They all appreciated that they were in the heart of the area that mattered most. And I found that we saw eye-to-eye on policy matters. A first-class working

relationship developed between us. Afterwards I had such confidence in them that I delegated people from Belfast to maintain closer supervision of some IOs in other parts of the North.

The training programme was seriously handicapped by lack of funds. But by improvising we managed to organise a practical course of weekend sessions consisting of lectures and demonstrations of various aspects of intelligence and counter-espionage work. These dealt with sources of information, identification techniques, working methods, memory training exercises and how to make out proper intelligence reports. We covered the organisation of the British armed forces, the RUC and the B-specials, as well as their armament and equipment.

Particular attention was paid to the RUC Special Branch. Each course would begin by interrogating every volunteer on his or her understanding of what intelligence work entailed. Then we established which Special Branch detectives they knew, with full descriptions and personal details. In this way, the volunteers were immediately brought to realise the practical value of information they already possessed through their own observation, and they could see from the word "go" that the courses were far from dry theory.

A number of the Belfast people were outstanding, particularly the women and girls, and among them were some intelligence "naturals" who would have been a gift to any revolutionary movement. Of the rural volunteers, some were very good indeed, but others did not see the need for the big effort I wanted. Still, here too there was gradual improvement until, by 1967, all but one of the Northern battalions were making satisfactory progress.

It took several months, of course, to get the intelligence department really organised and I did a great deal of travelling. Soon we had a good range of facilities, both in the North and at HQ, for photographic work, long-range visual intelligence, photocopying of documents, processing and tape-recording operations. By the beginning of 1967 we were busily experimenting with electronics.

Such experiments quickly showed that, in spite of the cinema and various real-life bugging scandals, many of the electronic devices supposed to be used in intelligence operations are in fact worse than useless. Many of those we tried out performed very poorly, or were too flimsy and unreliable for active service conditions. Republican technicians devised more sturdy items of electronic equipment

themselves, often using fairly ordinary components. Later on in the North, it was possible to monitor radio messages over the British company commanders' "Sunray" net on domestic television receivers.

Unfortunately, there could be no such improvisation with the high-quality optical lenses required for long-range photo surveillance and reconnaissance. Good ones cost a fortune, and they were always scarce. Miniature equipment was less of a problem. It was used to advantage to photograph official installations, military bases and members of the Northern police state apparatus while the going was good. Judging by the number of innocent people wrongly identified and arrested during the internment swoop four years later, the IRA had much more accurate photographic intelligence on the Special Branch than the RUC had on Republicans.

I decided to keep files held at HQ to a minimum, having come to the conclusion that it was better for local intelligence people to retain certain information in their heads. That way, nobody would know too much about matters outside his own area. And what files they had would be in code, so that if anything went wrong there would not be a lot to go adrift.

What had struck me about the obsolete files I had destroyed on taking over was the lack of "hard" intelligence and the amount of unconfirmed speculation. The priority should be to develop plain combat intelligence, and in particular target intelligence — that is, the information which unit commanders would need to mount successful operations against enemy personnel or to sabotage enemy installations. Harking back to my own methods in the London unit, I issued instructions to IOs that they should study the daily and local newspapers carefully, and indeed read every serious magazine and periodical they could lay their hands on.

Names and places are the real stuff of hard intelligence. Afterwards, when the war in the North was at its height, many a Republican officer put to effective use information which his IO had got by following up an interesting news item or press photograph. Something like eighty-five per cent of the intelligence collected by the major powers comes from media and other open sources, and it is none the less useful for that. It was up to revolutionaries to make use of them in a similar way.

Good intelligence work is mainly a matter of habits of mind. Apart from the value of the information that young IOs were shown

how to bring in, they were also increasing their alertness and developing the skills of analysing and co-ordinating intelligence.

Having laid the basis for the priority requirement in the North, a good system of combat intelligence, I was now able to turn my mind to improving the flow of political and economic intelligence. On moving up to Meath I was asked to resume work in Sinn Féin. When I did so, I was speedily elected to the Ard Comhairle, or national executive. Though it put an additional burden of work on me, I thought it would be a good idea to accept, since it should have helped me in principle to secure better political information. In practice, it turned out to be very disappointing and frustrating. During the couple of years I attended the meetings of the Ard Comhairle and of the Coiste Seasta, the Sinn Féin standing committee, I found them boring and a total waste of time. Numerous projects were discussed endlessly, but very few of them ever came to anything.

But if this lack of energy and push on the political side dismayed me, I found my patience driven to its very limits by the obstruction I encountered in the meetings of the Army Council itself. We seemed to spend hour after hour, week after week, discussing policy documents which never reached the rank and file and indeed never saw the light of day outside those meetings. It appeared to me that if this went on much longer the IRA would end up as a paper army, both demilitarised and demoralised.

Now, for the first time, I found myself forced to think seriously, as others were doing, about resigning from the Republican movement altogether. It would mean taking the very step I had made up my mind in Wormwood Scrubs that I would *not* take, because I would have thrown away nearly six years of my life for nothing. And it was a bad time to do it. I knew very well from my intelligence work in the North that the situation there could only deteriorate. If the hard-line Loyalists intensified their moves to get rid of O'Neill as Stormont premier, as they surely would, a strong Republican movement would be more necessary than ever. It would be hard to forgive myself if I were out of the movement when the struggle was resumed in the most decisive phase of all.

I decided that the only thing I could do was to soldier on, to turn up on time at every Council meeting and take full part in the discussions. That way, there would be at least some chance of getting an element of reality into the proceedings. As head of Republican

intelligence, I was expected to have practical information to report, which meant that the theory and ideology had to take a back seat for a while. It was during these moments that I had the opportunity to bring up the concrete military points.

Another innovation I brought to the Republican intelligence system was an economic intelligence unit which included graduate economists, a trade unions specialist and a trained statistician.

In 1967 this unit provided a very accurate forecast of the effects of the Anglo-Irish free trade agreement between Dublin and the Wilson government, which had come into effect not long before. It showed that this would be detrimental to Ireland's leather, footwear, clothing, hardware and other industries, including those producing certain building materials. The intelligence report was laid before the leadership as a basis for a campaign of agitation, but incredibly no action was taken.

By that time, both the Dublin and Belfast governments were offering all sorts of incentives to foreign capitalists and multinational corporations to set up factories. The South went further in regard to tax holidays and permitting investors to take their profits out of Ireland, but both sides were dishing out development grants and telling overseas industrialists how much cheaper labour there was available. At the same time, Irish capitalists were putting their own profits into British investments instead of using it to create employment at home. The situation would have been laughable if it had not been so degrading for Irish workers.

In a number of cases great publicity was given to announcements that this or that foreign company had decided to open a factory which was going to provide hundreds or thousands of jobs, and local politicians fell over themselves trying to claim credit. But there was less heard from official quarters when the deals fell through, as they often did. The Fianna Fáil government created the illusion of a big industrial boom, but the imposing lists of foreign companies starting up in Ireland did not show the reality. Many of them were nothing but re-export operations, adding nothing to the nation's wealth. Components were shipped in from abroad, assembled by low-paid Irish labour and shipped out again in finished form for sale in better-off markets. Many more were small-scale businesses employing forty or fifty women and girls. Some were run by directors who went into liquidation or pulled out when the grant money was exhausted. And still more were satellites of prosperous British firms which

exploited the favourable conditions while it suited them. Then they would close down their Irish factories on one pretext or other, causing untold misery in communities which were just getting used to regular employment. In almost every case where this happened, the parent company in England was not affected and continued in full production.

We kept careful track of some of these sharp practices, and I produced another operational proposal. It was evident that certain capitalists were content to pull out of Ireland and sacrifice their Irish workers after manipulating the grants, tax exemptions and incentives to their own short-term advantage. I urged that we should be prepared in such cases to send special units to England and destroy the home factories concerned.

This became a live issue when there was an apparently accidental fire at a shoe factory in a border town and the English owners announced that they would not re-open it. The Republican intelligence department quickly came up with the location and other details of the parent plant in England, including the information that there was no security on it at weekends. It was a set-up for a sabotage operation that would have put the plant completely out of production. This would have been the correct revolutionary action. It would have been an example to Republicans and an object lesson to British capitalists, whose callous exploitation of Irish workers threw them back on the dole line after providing rich profits for years. What was more, the reason for such action would be made unmistakable even to the the kind of English worker who believes in "my country, right or wrong." But once again, my proposal was rejected by a leadership which professed itself to be committed to social and economic agitation.

By the New Year of 1968, I concluded that my situation had become quite impossible. At home, Mary could see from my gloomy mood that something was now badly wrong. One evening I came in and dropped into an armchair to concentrate and come to a decision on what to do. My daughters were being boisterous, and I was rather short with them.

"Don't aggravate your father," Mary told them. "Can't you see he's worried?" When we were alone she studied me and said, "What is it that's on your mind lately?"

I told her the gist of it. "What would you think if I were to resign from the movement?" I said.

"You do what you think is right," she replied.

"If I resigned I wouldn't feel I had the right to stay here in Ireland," I said. I was just on the brink of forty. I would still have time to clear out and start a new life for us somewhere else.

"That's nonsense," Mary said. "Of course you have a right to stay here. You've done more than plenty of others. Anyway, I don't see why I should have to leave my own country again." And, she pointed out, even if I did leave the Republican movement I would still have plenty of satisfying work on the cultural side.

This was true enough. My efforts in promoting Irish language activities had not gone unappreciated. Even dividing my time between the movement and fund-raising work, I was able to bring in several thousand pounds a year for the organisation connected with the Gaelic Athletic Association which employed me. In fact, I had been offered a better position with more pay and responsibility in the same line. If I accepted, it would mean moving back to Cork in a full-time appointment that would require my total attention and energies.

After thinking things over for a while longer, I finally made a decision. I sat down and wrote out my resignation from the Republican movement.

When I had finished my letter, I sat staring at it for a long time. I had imagined that I would feel a great sense of relief now that I had finally faced the problem and dealt with it. But I felt no such thing. The letter looked unreal, as though somebody else had written it. I discovered that it is not possible to resign from your own beliefs. It was like saying, "I resign from myself."

Well, that was an eye-opener for me. It hadn't occurred to me that weighing the pros and cons, as I was used to doing in making military decisions, would do so little to settle the matter in this case. I tore the letter up and asked to see Cathal Goulding.

I had a real down-to-earth talk with him. I reminded Cathal how close he and I had been at one time. Now, I said, we were drifting further and further apart until we seemed to agree on nothing. Once more we explained our views to each other, but again we made no progress. As always, it was policies that separated us, not personalities. In fact, that was true of others besides Goulding. As individuals, I liked one or two of those who disagreed with my views a lot better than some who shared them.

But if I had been unable to bring myself to resign, I soon had

cause to believe that somebody very high in the movement was manoeuvring to bring about my dismissal. I do not think that person was Goulding himself, although two people who tried this game were very close to him. I had not been all this time in a revolutionary organisation without developing a certain sixth sense about provocateurs and their methods.

First of all one of these characters, who had never been noted for his militancy, went out of his way to cultivate my friendship. He began to buttonhole me as we left the weekly HQ staff meetings. He expressed strong criticism of members of the leadership, and went on to advocate that their “softly, softly” policies should be ignored in favour of revolutionary action against the British.

The second try was by a man who, out of the movement for a while, had returned to become very active in Dublin. Instead of giving me phoney militancy, he would pour his troubles out on my shoulder, meanwhile denouncing the Army Council. But I wasn’t having any of this either. The idea in both cases was to get me to make disloyal criticisms of the leadership, thus laying me open to dismissal from the movement under regulations. It was badly thought out.

My spirits lightened at last in the summer of 1968 when an event occurred that reunited the entire Republican leadership. Half a century of discrimination against Catholics for jobs and housing in the North finally came to a head.

A proposal arrived at Dublin HQ from the Tyrone unit of the IRA. It asked that members of the Republican movement be permitted to take part in a civil rights march to Dungannon from Coalisland, four miles away, with the Civil Rights Association which had recently been founded. The Association was on the lines of the National Council for Civil Liberties in England, dealing with individual cases up to then and not engaged in mass action. The leadership unanimously gave permission, and word was sent to all Republican units in the North to encourage as many people as possible to participate. I emphasise “encourage” because the leadership did not make it compulsory. It was also decided that no known members of the IRA from the South would participate.

Little did the handful of people who sponsored it, or the Republican leadership who supported it, imagine where that first civil rights march was to lead the entire nation. After all the wearying arguments of the previous years, it was wonderful to see a proposal

taken up with not the slightest friction or acrimony. Everybody present at that meeting saw the value of the march and of the new tactics.

The Unionist hard-liners in the North tried to get the march banned by calling a counter-rally in Dungannon for the same Saturday. This brought fifteen hundred of the Ulster Protestant Volunteers into Dungannon, a large proportion of them members of the B-specials. John Taylor MP said there would be trouble if the marchers entered the town square, which he described as "Unionist territory."

On police orders the march was rerouted. By the time it reached the barrier the RUC had erected, there were between three and four thousand people in the procession. Some rough stuff broke out when a police officer used his blackthorn stick, and Gerry Fitt sent a report to Harold Wilson demanding assurances that people engaging in peaceful protest would not be batoned and manhandled by the RUC. After speeches, the leaders of the civil rights movement at that time advised the marchers to go home. Instead, they sat down in the road singing songs and stayed there until quite late at night.

The point had been made. The people had come out and marched. That very week, the Russians had invaded Czechoslovakia and the people there had won the world's sympathy by presenting the same kind of resistance to the Red Army tanks. It was the beginning of a new strategy that the Unionists did not quite know how to cope with. The marchers had carried no sectarian symbols or political banners, and people of all denominations, and some of none at all, were among them that evening. By their sectarian housing policies, the Unionists had finally overdone it and united many different shades of opinion against them in a demand for justice. The times had caught up with them at last, and with Britain, who had allowed her flag to fly for almost fifty years over the rottenest political system in Western Europe.

I and others in Republican circles saw that the civil rights strategy and the Unionists' puzzled and threatening reaction to it could lead to a very dangerous situation. Therefore it was more than ever essential to maintain the IRA at as high a standard of military efficiency as possible.

Demanding an increase in active training, I pressed the point that some of our own members had helped to initiate the new weapon of mass civil rights protest in the North. The least we expected of the

IRA was that it would be ready to meet the dangers that this development might bring about.

At the next Army convention that autumn, however, a resolution was carried which was to be of untold significance for the IRA. It expanded the membership of the Army Council from seven men to twenty. Although I was once more re-elected, the odds now were vastly increased against those of us who upheld militant Republican separatism. In an artificially inflated leadership we were in a minority to anti-revolutionaries obsessed with parliamentary politics and Marxist debates. That resolution cleverly outwitted the majority of the delegates from the units, who had again voted more than two to one against the proposal to end parliamentary abstentionism.

But by this time events in the North were moving too fast for me to dwell very long on the position this manoeuvre had placed me in. After Dungannon, what everyone wanted to know was, "When is the next march?"

It was fixed for October 5 in Derry. There had already been demonstrations and protests there against the vicious sectarian housing policy, and unemployment had been terrible for many years among the Catholics who actually formed the majority of the city's population. When William Craig, then Minister of Home Affairs at Stormont, heard of the plans for the Derry civil rights march, his reaction was simple. He banned it.

What happened in Derry has long since passed into modern political history. Craig's arrogant ban did not prevent lawful protest by opponents of the Unionist regime. On the contrary, it induced more people than ever to take part. A crowd of two thousand, including Nationalist, Liberal and Labour MPs from the North and from London, challenged his abuse of power in prohibiting a peaceful procession. The RUC, including two platoons of riot police, attacked them with batons, boots and high-powered water cannons. The first victims they clubbed were two of the MPs. The people drew back, only to be attacked by a second wave of police and caught in a box formation. When the RUC came into the Nationalist district of the Bogside, the residents retaliated with stones. Barricades went up and there was a series of clashes during the night. According to official British figures seventy-seven civilians were injured, but Irish journalists reported that ninety-six were treated in hospital. There was no doubt, however, that many of the casualties went elsewhere for help. Bernadette Devlin was told at Altnagelvin Hospital, where

one of the injured marchers was stitched up, "He didn't get hit hard enough."

Craig denied to the press that the RUC had behaved brutally, despite the horrified reactions of millions who saw on television the naked facts of state violence as the police batoned a boy between the legs and used their boots on people lying on the ground. Much of the force of that television coverage was due to a courageous Radio Telefis Eireann cameraman, whose film record to this day remains an embarrassing contrast to edited British versions. At long last, people everywhere began to ask the very thing we had been waiting years for them to ask, "What the hell is going on up there anyway?"

The only reason the Unionist system had been able to exist was that the British turned a blind eye to its injustices. Once the reality was dragged out into the light of day, attracting international attention, it was the beginning of the end. The Unionist leadership, with the mentality of the white racialists of South Africa or Rhodesia, had tried to teach the new civil rights movement a lesson before it built up too much strength. It was quite evident from the way the RUC men had been stationed that the attack on the marchers was premeditated. The role of the riot police was not to prevent a riot, but to provoke one. "If they don't get off the streets give them the stick, and plenty of it," was the motto.

But the lesson that had been taught in Derry was a very different one. What it brought home to a great number of people was that you could hope to carry non-violent action only to a limited point of success. The moment that protesters posed any serious challenge to the establishment, they were sadly fooling themselves if they thought that keeping their actions within legal bounds would give them any protection. That is when you are going to wish dearly that you had something more than songs and slogans for defence.

Within hours October 5, 1968 could be clearly seen as a turning point in Irish history. But, though the RUC's savage behaviour caused intense anger throughout the whole of Ireland, there was not a single word of protest from the Dublin government. And in London the Speaker of the House of Commons, a Labour Party man, prevented some MPs from raising the matter, saying that it was not the "convention" of Westminster to discuss the North's internal affairs. The Nationalist Party leader, Eddie McAteer, had been right when he said the minority would get little protection from the South or elsewhere. When Wilson finally found that the North could be

discussed after all, he said that the Northern premier O'Neill was being "blackmailed by thugs." He did not mention that a large number of them wore his Queen's uniform. The only protection the Nationalists could look to against the RUC, the undisciplined B-specials and the growing threat of the Loyalist extremists was the IRA.

In the propaganda effort to create sympathy for the RUC, the English media frequently referred to them as "PCs" or "policemen" as though they were ordinary unarmed village cops on bicycles. They were, of course, a paramilitary force with heavy armament that went all the way up to armoured cars mounting Browning machine-guns. Together with the armed B-specials and the RUC reserve, there were twelve thousand of them. The total membership of the IRA was only a few hundred at that time, of which approximately half was in the North.

Now that the Army Council had been packed to three times its proper size by the nominees of the "politicals" it was heavy going to get anything settled at the unwieldy twenty-man meetings. However, I argued strongly that we must make preparations to defend the Nationalist population, some of whom would be in desperate straits in isolated enclaves if an Orange pogrom began. But in spite of the glaring example of Derry, I was stunned to find that some of the members had failed to draw the lesson from the epic happenings of that day. I listened in utter disbelief while one of them got up at a Council meeting to solemnly declare that the British army would have to protect people in the North from the excesses of the RUC! I put up a modified proposal which, I believed, might be more easily accepted. It was supported by others who felt as I did. I suggested that, instead of bringing up the strength of the IRA by recruiting openly, we would set up a system of auxiliary units purely for the defence of the Nationalist districts, particularly in Derry. There we had the services of Seán Keenan, a well known and highly respected Republican veteran who was the ideal man to take charge of the new unit.

The proposal was shot down.

This time I did not lose heart. After Derry I was by no means fighting in a lonely corner. A great many Republicans equally realised that a crisis in the North was on the way, and that it was not likely to be averted. They realised the military obligations that would come with it.

So at the next meeting of the extended leadership, I returned to the fray in the confidence that I was speaking for many others besides myself. I said that as the civil rights campaign gathered momentum, the Unionist reaction would present an increasingly heavy threat to the Nationalist areas. If serious attacks came and our units were not able to contain them, IRA prestige and support would be very badly damaged, and perhaps beyond recovery. On the other hand, if we provided adequate defence for an area that came under attack, our prestige in that area and in general would be greatly enhanced. We could then exploit this initiative, move over from defensive to offensive action, and concentrate on the main national objective of ending British rule in Ireland.

But from the chairman of the Council and from the Adjutant-General the same answer came repeatedly: "The time is not right yet for military action." They sat there poring endlessly over their volumes of policy documents as though the North was a million miles away. Still nothing was done to obtain new equipment, step up training or look to defences.

An officer in charge of a large area in the North stood up at one of the meetings and said in deep anxiety, "Trouble is obviously coming. If it breaks in my area, my entire ammunition supply consists of seventy-five rounds for all calibres. What in God's name can I do with that? What defence can I provide?"

The reality of that officer's predicament seemed to break through the clouds of theory at last. Specific and definite promises were given that Thompson guns, short arms and ammunition would be collected in from Southern units and sent up to the sensitive areas in the North.

These promises were not kept. Nothing was done.

I had kept patience long enough. The Irish Republican Army had been bogged down in politics to the point where young girl students from the Northern universities had left it far behind in revolutionary initiative.

I decided I would act on my own as the fateful year of 1969 approached. And just about then, Mary told me she was sure now. She was going to have a baby. Boy or girl, it seemed almost certain to be a war baby.

Chapter 8

The North Erupts

By the beginning of 1969 I was spending every weekend and every hour of spare time I could in the North, watching the situation as it developed on the ground. It was indeed turning out to be as dangerous as I and others had incessantly tried to warn the Army Council. By now it was showing the unmistakable signs of a classic revolutionary process. Most of the basic conditions were already there, and the rest were appearing week by week.

It has been said that most revolutions are not caused by revolutionaries in the first place, but by the stupidity and brutality of governments. Well, you had that to start with in the North all right. An oppressive regime, feudal class distinctions, severe unemployment, a dud economy, an increasingly unstable political set-up, and right-wing extremist movements, all happening in a neglected colony of a decaying imperial power. And after the shock of October 5 in Derry the whole process began to move like clockwork.

Harold Wilson represented the imperial government embarrassed by bad international publicity over the excesses of its colonial police. O'Neill was the colonial premier called to London, ticked off and told to promise some minor reforms. Paisley was the voice of the extreme right in the streets, which saw its own position threatened by reforms and was mobilising the forces of reaction to oppose them. Craig was the right-wing minister in charge of the armed state police, who wanted to get rid of a prime minister he and his friends considered weak, upper-class and "soft on subversives." The right believed that once O'Neill went, it would be easy to deal with the civil rights movement and keep the Nationalist minority in its subordinate status. This would be done officially by the Craig-police

combination, and unofficially by the Loyalist extremist organisations.

It was evident that the civil rights movement had badly shaken both the British and the Unionists. And it was more important than ever that maximum public pressure be maintained in support of its demands for real social justice. But instead of intensifying their public actions, the civil rights leaders declared a temporary truce in December 1968 with no marches, no demonstrations and no protests for four weeks. In effect, they were giving O'Neill what he wanted more desperately than anything else — time: time to organise his own support both among the public and inside the Unionist party, time to recover some of the ground lost at Derry and perhaps to repair the terrible image the regime now had. When Craig criticised O'Neill again in a speech, this time O'Neill plucked up enough nerve to sack him from the government. Craig, he explained, had been advocating that the North should issue a unilateral declaration of independence and go it alone (on the lines of Rhodesia, naturally).

The civil rights movement might thus have been out-manoeuvred by O'Neill, on account of its own timid tactics in calling the truce, were it not for the courage and foresight of the People's Democracy members who refused to observe any let-up in the protest campaign. The PD was formed by students of Queen's University in Belfast as a response to the October events in Derry. They demanded the principle of one man, one vote in local government elections instead of the restricted franchise based on property qualifications. They called for an end to the crooked gerrymandering that produced Unionist majorities even in areas where there was a majority of Nationalists, as well as reforms of housing and education, state investment in industry to provide jobs, and allocation of land from vast private estates to agricultural co-operatives. The People's Democracy also demanded the repeal of repressive legislation and the disbanding of the B-specials. This made them some dangerous enemies.

The PD went ahead and called a long march from Belfast to Derry, over seventy miles, on New Year's Day 1969. This daring action by a few dozen young people put new life into the civil rights campaign, and effectively ended O'Neill's chances of political survival. No wonder he described it as a "foolhardy and irresponsible" undertaking.

The marchers were hindered and harried over the entire route. On

the fourth and last day, they were ambushed at Burntollet bridge near Derry by hundreds of Loyalist extremists, including many serving and former B-specials. More than eighty marchers were taken to hospital, and many others suffered lesser injuries. Bleeding and battered, those who were able to go on somehow re-formed further along and completed the march to Derry. Then they were attacked again by a crowd. Both at Burntollet and at Irish Street in Derry, women and girls on the march were attacked just as brutally as men. "The Loyalists gave them just what they deserved," commented the *Loyalist News*

One of those attacked on January 4 was a young Belfast girl named Dolours Price. She was planning a teaching career, and though she came from a Republican family, she had been convinced until then that non-violent protest would succeed in overcoming the injustice in the North. Four years later, in the Winchester trial, she was convicted with her sister and her other comrades for the car-bombs at the Old Bailey and London police headquarters.

As though the behaviour of the B-specials had not been enough, the regular RUC showed itself in its true colours as well. On the night after Burntollet groups of RUC men went into the Bogside area of Derry and ran wild. Some of them had been drinking heavily. They attacked Nationalist homes and shops and batoned anyone they came across. Fighting broke out, and after that weekend more than a hundred and twenty people received hospital treatment for injuries, including twenty of the police attackers. A few days afterwards another twenty-eight people were injured in a confrontation between the RUC and civil rights supporters in Newry.

In the first few weeks of the new year, therefore, my intelligence warnings of the previous months were being proved correct. The dangers which the IRA leadership had been ignoring were upon us. If the RUC and the B-specials were going to give the lead in attacking the Nationalist areas, how long could it be before the Loyalist mobs followed their example? The vital thing was to get on with helping in the defence of the vulnerable areas. I disliked going about this on my own, and I had to be extremely cautious in doing it. I began to collect supplies which I knew of in the South, including ammunition, an occasional weapon and a few handgrenades. I passed these myself directly to the intelligence officer in Belfast. I had the closest contact with him and could trust him to keep these transactions quiet, so that they would not leak back to the Army Council and raise hell.

It also came to my attention that people who had been out of the IRA for some time were involving themselves in similar efforts without going near the leadership, and some had even begun to run training camps.

Normally it would be my duty as a senior intelligence officer to acquaint the leadership immediately with any information I had about the emergence of splinter groups. Such groups can cause great problems to the main revolutionary organisation in many ways, particularly in the attribution of responsibility for unwelcome activities. It would have been wrong for me to put these people in that category, and I did not pass on any of the reports which reached me about what they were doing. They were men from Belfast and other parts of the North who had to think of protecting their own and their neighbours' homes and families.

Events that spring reinforced my own certainty and that of other Republicans that the Ulster Loyalist reaction would soon break out in earnest. Explosions at the end of March and during April wrecked electricity and water installations. A competently placed big charge at the reservoir in Silent Valley affected more than half the Belfast water supply.

The same weekend, there was serious rioting in Derry. Paisleyites arrived in the city and attacked civil rights supporters. Fierce fighting spread into the Bogside. The RUC used armoured cars, water-cannon and baton charges in an attempt to push their way in. This time they were driven back with petrol bombs. A group of them burst into a house and beat up a man named Samuel Devenny in front of his children. He died later. Seventy-nine civilians were treated in hospital, but the RUC had paid heavily too. They gave their own casualties as two hundred and nine injured. Even if they had exaggerated this figure to get sympathy, it was evident that with the most rudimentary, improvised weapons the residents of the Bogside had faced them and given as good as they got. As far as Free Derry was concerned, it had become a struggle between the people and the police.

As the sabotage explosions continued, the Northern right-wing press laid the blame on the IRA in scare headlines. But I was quite certain that none of our units were involved. Through our intelligence sources I learned that not only were these operations carried out by Unionist extremists, but that members of the B-specials had taken part in them. A former B-special named Samuel Stevenson was



An IRA sniper in action in Co. Fermanagh. The snipers were trained marksmen and were taught to fire one shot, then immediately go to ground.



Seán MacStiofáin and Martin Meehan at the graveside of Colm Keenan, 17 March 1972. (*Press Association*)



Picture of Gerry Adams attending a Catholic funeral in January 1973. Adams was a member of the IRA delegation which negotiated a truce with the British government on 20 June 1972. (*Press Association*)



(Left to right) Martin McGuinness, David O'Connell, Seán MacStiofáin and Séamus Twomey at the press conference given from Free Derry in June 1972.
(*Photograph by Lief Skoogfors, Camera Press, London*)

Cathal Goulding has been Chief of Staff of the Official IRA for the last ten years.





Protesters outside Dublin's Bridewell station, calling for the release of Seán MacStiofáin, immediately after his arrest in November 1972. (*Syndication International*)



MacStiofáin's wife Mary and daughter Sinéad leaving the Curragh Military Prison where MacStiofáin staged his hunger-and-thirst strike in 1972. (*Colman Doyle*)

later arrested and pleaded guilty to causing the Silent Valley explosions. Our intelligence had again been correct. The first bombs of the Northern struggle were set off by the Loyalists themselves, though it had done them little good.

The counter-revolutionary game was wide open now. It was the coup against O'Neill. More than two hundred police injured, water and electricity supplies interrupted, bombs going off, causing damage estimated at two million pounds — this was all supposed to be the result of his “soft” reformist policy. The right-wingers were trying to blow him out of office to make way for a Unionist strong man.

The strong man was to have been Brian Faulkner, who had the support of Craig, Harry West and other hard-liners. Sure enough, O'Neill went on the last day of April, saying goodbye in another of his emotional television appearances. But the coup went wrong. Faulkner was beaten for the premiership by one vote. Instead, the rich Unionist landlords and aristocrats elected one of their own kind, James Chichester-Clark. He was a wealthy farmer, and O'Neill's cousin.

Chichester-Clark was a political disaster. The Unionists were stuck now with a leader who tried to keep O'Neillism going with none of O'Neill's personal appeal.

It did not take much inside knowledge to guess when the balloon would go up. The summer was the traditional time for sectarian violence in the North, and Orange hysteria would reach its peak on July 12, the anniversary of the Battle of the Boyne. They would be likely to get past the holiday, however, before looking for trouble. The danger point was from mid-July onwards.

With some anxiety, I knew that was around the time when Mary was due to have her baby, and I prayed that all would go well with them both.

In the few weeks remaining to us, I and my friends pleaded repeatedly with the IRA leadership to take heed of the warnings we were supplying ourselves and relaying from our threatened comrades in the North. On the very brink, the “politicals” still refused to do anything. To these men, and to nobody else, we must ascribe the disaster and the disgrace that fell at last upon the IRA in August 1969.

It began on August 2 in Belfast when a huge Loyalist crowd from the Shankill Road, accompanied by two hundred of the local extremist organisation, attacked and tried to invade the Unity Flats

development, where the tenants were Nationalists. The first person killed was an old man who could neither read nor write. On the two following days, shots were fired into Catholic streets off the Crumlin Road and several people were wounded. The barricades went up, petrol bombs exploded, homes and public houses were set on fire. This was it.

I was very glad that Mary had had her baby before it all began. I had been to see her at the hospital in Drogheda. Now the father of a third daughter, a fair-haired little girl whom we christened Sinéad, I was very thankful that both of them were in fine form.

Then fifteen thousand Loyalists insisted on parading through Derry on a route that would take them to the edge of the Nationalist Bogside area. Despite advance warnings, Chichester-Clark's government did nothing to prevent them. Seán Keenan, who had been elected chairman of the Derry Citizens' Defence Association, said at a mass meeting that if the Nationalist people there were attacked they would defend themselves. In the circumstances, the provocation of the Loyalist parade at such a time could only be dynamite. On August 12 the marchers in their bowler hats, sashes and regalia sure enough touched it off. They threw pennies into the Nationalist streets from the city walls to signify their gloating over the unemployment in the area. The insult was returned, and then began what became known the world over as the Battle of the Bogside.

It lasted three days. The RUC and the B-specials burst into the Bogside, using an armoured car to smash their way through the barricades. Crowds of Loyalists thirsting for action were massed behind them. They got action all right, and a lot more than they bargained for. The people had nothing to fight with but stones and petrol bombs, but they used them fiercely and effectively. The police were forced to retreat under the barrages that rained down from the roofs and from behind the barricades, and little more was seen of the mob that had been yelling behind them. On the second and third days the police repeatedly renewed their attacks, firing CS gas for the first time in the North. When news of this got out, it created immense anger.

An urgent appeal went out from Derry for demonstrations in other towns to take the pressure off the Bogside. But people were already taking to the streets of their own accord. Crowds demonstrated at RUC barracks in Newry, Coalisland and Strabane, and clashes spread to Enniskillen, Lurgan and Armagh.

The Civil Rights Association issued a public warning that "a war of genocide is about to flare across the North" and called for immediate action by the Dublin government, including the recall of troops serving the United Nations forces in Cyprus. This demand, together with rising public feeling in the South, was followed by a broadcast from Jack Lynch which made the situation more dangerous than ever. He said that the Stormont government was no longer in control of the situation, called on Britain to request an UN peacekeeping force, and announced that Dublin troops were setting up field hospitals along the border. Having said that his government could "not stand idly by" he then proceeded to do exactly that.

This meaningless political exercise had several bad results. It cruelly raised false hopes for a while among the Nationalists under attack without providing one iota of practical assistance. It enabled Chichester-Clark and the Unionists to divert attention and blame to the South "which seeks to wound us in our darkest hour." Worst of all, Lynch's broadcast started wild rumours in Loyalist districts of Belfast that Southern troops were about to cross the border. Anti-Nationalist feeling was whipped up to a peak by Orange extremists whose attitude was, "Let's get them before the Free State army come to help them."

As soon as civil rights supporters protested in Belfast that evening in response to the Bogsidiers' appeal, the RUC used armoured cars to break up their demonstration, and the situation quickly developed into a pogrom. Heavily armed police, together with B-specials and the Orange mobs, attacked Nationalist streets in Belfast. Five people were killed and two hundred injured. Almost two hundred homes were burned out, dozens of them having been clearly selected as premeditated targets. Bombay Street, off the Falls Road, was gutted, and many Catholic families were forced out of mixed areas. In Armagh another man was killed when B-specials opened fire after a civil rights meeting.

That day I went to Dublin, taking Mary with me. I was determined to see the members of the IRA leadership and find out what they proposed to do. Whether they liked it or not, the politicals would have to sanction military action to relieve the appalling pressure on Belfast and Derry.

Before leaving for Dublin, I had arranged that all volunteers from North Leinster suitable for active service were moved up to a border area which was under my control at the time, together with what

equipment was available. That done, my intention was to ask for a briefing and instructions. As it was our wedding anniversary, I would then have a meal with my wife, take her home to Meath, say goodbye and hit the road north for active service myself.

Mary and I reached Dublin by mid-morning. We spent the rest of the day trying to track down members of the leadership, but found nobody. Had they gone northwards themselves without telling us? I came back home completely fed up. I checked to confirm that my own instructions had been carried out and that the men for the border had left. Other than that, I could only wait for someone from HQ to get in touch.

When the phone rang, I jumped to it. To my irritation, it was a call from an English television cameraman. He informed me that he had been making a film “with Mr Goulding and Mr Mick Ryan” and on their recommendation he was contacting me.

I found it difficult to believe what he was telling me. With the national crisis on our hands, they had apparently been up in the Dublin mountains doing interviews all day, while the people in the Bogside could hardly see each other in the fighting for gas and smoke. I gave the cameraman a piece of my mind, though looking back it was hardly his fault, and hung up.

Later on, I made contact at last. I got instructions to go to Dublin for a conference with the leadership on the following day. I went into town in an angry mood, prepared to have it out. But before I was able to say very much they told me to take charge of an active service area. Pleased and mollified, I did not wait for the end of the meeting.

“Well,” I said, “that means I have a hell of a lot to do.” And away I went.

I arrived in my new area as fast as I could. The base was a large farmhouse near the border, just below South Armagh. Everything was chaos. Men were streaming across the border from the North, looking for weapons, demanding to see officers. Some volunteers, hurt in an operation at a border customs post the night before, had been taken to hospital. Many of the people at the farmhouse didn’t know what they were supposed to do, and a lot more were inclined to do nothing.

It took several hours to get order into this state of affairs. The first matter I attended to was to appoint a staff for the area. Next I arranged a unit routine. Everybody was to be in bed by midnight.

The staff would get up and have breakfast first, followed by a staff meeting each morning between eight and nine o'clock. The rest of the men in the vicinity would group up and come on parade at half-past ten under one of the staff. Then the volunteers available would either be employed on procuring supplies, weapons, ammunition and other equipment, or would train recruits.

Recruits were flocking into the Republican movement at the time. Many more who had previously left were coming back in. With them came men who had served in the Free State army, the British services or the FCA, the South's local defence force. All wanted to join the IRA and fight. Despite their experience, a lot who joined us then did not manage to stick the pace. Military training is always useful, but service in a conventional army is not the best preparation for guerrilla warfare. We frequently had much more success with smart lads who learned revolutionary warfare from scratch. Most of the ex-soldiers turned out well, however, and it is to their credit that they came forward at such a time.

In between times, I was glued to the radio news bulletins following the developing situation. Heavy sniping was going on all day in Belfast. In Dublin fifty people were injured when the Gardai baton-charged demonstrators protesting outside the British embassy. That sort of thing made the Northerners despair more than ever of any hope of assistance from the Lynch government.

My last instructions on leaving the HQ meeting in Dublin had been to get my area into action as soon as possible. But on checking with the local staff in Newry, I was told that any action in their neighbourhood would be very unpopular with the civilian population there. The next thing I knew was that British troops had arrived from England and entered the Nationalist areas. The women in the streets were out giving them cups of tea.

It was understandable that exhausted people should see the British army as a new factor in the situation. But they would quickly realise that a colonial power does not send its army to hurry up social reforms. The British general, Freeland, was under no illusions about why he was there. He warned his men that this was a honeymoon that wouldn't last.

Republicans from the North knew it too, and quickly appeared at the base looking for equipment and supplies. "It's only a lull," they said. They were determined that they would not be caught defenceless again.

What hit us all was that we had long been waiting for an opportunity for the IRA to prove itself, to grab the opening and then expand it to achieve the national aims of the movement. Now, when the opportunity had been handed to us on a plate, the organisation had not been up to it. It was a humiliating experience to hear what people were writing on the walls in Belfast now. Only a few days ago it had been *RUC = SS*. Now it was *IRA = I RAN AWAY*.

This jibe was grossly unfair to the local units in Belfast, who had had to take the brunt of the attacks with next to no resources. It was not the fault of the volunteers there that the movement had been unable to provide maximum defence for the Nationalist areas. In my opinion, though, the fault lay partly with Republican commanders in the North. They had not kicked up half enough row with Dublin about keeping them deprived of the weapons that were so sorely needed. They, more than anyone else in the movement, had known what was coming. They simply had not stood up to the political theorists at HQ and hammered home their case.

Well, they were certainly yelling for stuff now. From that August weekend, the entire country was combed and scoured for arms, ammunition and any other bit of equipment that would be of any use. Odd magazines, binoculars, sights were raked out too. From my base we sent out three cars, one down the east coast, one to the south-west and one into Dublin. One was back inside a day, and the others returned twenty-four hours later. They were all loaded with material. A fourth car set off foraging from contacts in the Midlands and returned with another excellent haul.

These four loads were quickly distributed to the Northerners. There was enough to equip two units on the border. We had also been promised some ammunition from HQ. But I knew these promises by now, so I sent somebody to Dublin to chase them up and see that they disgorged it. He came back with a message that we were to get it from the HQ dump, which had been moved to a new location. When he told me where it was, I knew I was in luck. I knew the people who owned the place, and they would not question what I had in mind.

Without hesitation I went on my own, entered the dump and looked at what was stored there. It was a sight for sore eyes. I cleared out the whole damn lot and drove it back to the base. Soon we were distributing these rifles, Thompsons, short arms, ammunition and grenades to Belfast men, Newry men, Armagh men, and Derry men.

From then on, nobody who came looking for weapons got a complete refusal. We managed to provide something for them all. It was infuriating to realise that all this material had been lying in that dump when it could have been sent in good time to the areas that needed it.

Nobody had cancelled my instructions, and we still proposed to operate if we could. When I had suggested retaliatory action against known RUC men and B-specials who had been responsible for brutality in Derry and Burntollet in previous months, the "politicals" had turned me down flat. Soon an amazing procession of messengers began to arrive from Dublin one after another. I think there were six of them in all. The leadership had sent each of them to find me with the same agitated instructions. I was to do nothing, and if I was doing anything already, I was to stop.

One of these geniuses at headquarters actually telephoned a post office on the border and asked if they could contact the local IRA. If so, the message was "For Christ's sake, don't do anything else."

But we had our own plans worked out. I issued instructions to the units on the Northern side that if they ran across any B-special patrols, they should open up on them regardless. I had made up my mind to report back to HQ that the Specials had opened fire first. It was exactly the same excuse that the RUC had put out in Belfast when they had fired on civilians, so it would even matters up a bit. But the Specials were apparently taking no chances. They did not appear, and we had no such engagements.

Money had been very tight in the Republican movement before the outbreaks in Belfast and Derry. Now it began to flow in from big public collections and private donations. For the first time anyone could remember, it looked as though the IRA would have no financial worries for a while. But would they use it for the purpose for which it had been so readily given, to acquire the means of defence? I was given no time to find out just then, for the revisionists in Dublin now made a blunder that brought a hornet's nest around our ears.

I had been away from the base one day, and arrived back to find a very angry staff man coming out to meet me. "Those f---rs in Dublin are trying to get us all arrested," he said.

That was the first I heard of the most controversial statement publicly issued by the leadership at that time. It said that IRA volunteers had taken part in actions in the Bogside and other parts of

the North — and went on to add that units were in readiness on the border. It was a political bloomer of the worst possible indiscretion. The volunteers were furious, while Prime Minister Lynch, regarding this as a challenge, said publicly that his government would not tolerate “usurpation” of their power.

There was an element of confusion as to the source of the statement. Cathal Goulding’s name was attached to it, but I had a strong idea that Goulding himself was out of Dublin at that time.

Up to then, the Gardai, the Irish Police, had not been interfering with us in any way in our area. Undoubtedly they were aware that any arms traffic through the South was one-way only, to the North and for defensive purposes. In any case, they could not but have some fellow-feeling for the sufferings of their own compatriots, and the anguished condition of the women and children coming down as refugees had left a strong impression. The Gardai seemed to understand that we would give them no trouble, and they gave us none. Now this unofficial live-and-let-live attitude would be destroyed and the Dublin government would turn on the heat.

The officers and men with me were so incensed by the tactlessness of the statement that they asked me to go down to Dublin and demand an explanation. I set off with the area adjutant. As we left the base the following morning we spotted a Gardai patrol car stationed opposite the boreen leading to our position. We observed that they noted down the number of our car, and there was an appreciable increase in police activity most of the way between the border and Dublin.

On reaching the city, we searched in the places where members of the leadership were expected to be. None was to be found. Eventually we met Tom Mitchell, a member of the Sinn Féin Ard Comhairle, and told him who we were looking for and why. He said there had been a wave of similar complaints from other border units and from Northerners in Dublin on official business.

When I finally got to the heart of the matter and discovered why the statement had been issued, my anger knew no bounds. I was aware, of course, that for some time the revisionist leadership had involved in decision-making certain people who were not members of the movement. These advisers had gained so much influence that they were now drafting certain policies themselves. After the events of the past few days in the North, they feared that Harold Wilson might pluck up enough courage to abolish Stormont altogether. They

wanted to save it, and the purpose of the statement had been nothing less than to strengthen Chichester-Clark's hand when he met Wilson, enabling him to attribute the pogrom and the RUC attacks to the activities of the IRA!

I recognised the thinking behind this fantastic theory as the old Western Communist Party line that the masses were not ready for a revolution, so there shouldn't be a revolution. Abolition of Stormont would be a major step forward in the national revolution in Ireland. The revisionists therefore decided that Stormont should be preserved if possible, hoping that the situation in the North would quickly return to normal, and that the civil rights movement, which they were planning to take over completely, would be restored to its former dominant position. Although this statement was not issued by Goulding himself, in spite of his name being on it, I later understood him to say that if he had been in Dublin at the time he would have released it.

At any rate, Stormont survived for a while longer. Wilson endorsed it in the "Downing Street Declaration" which was supposed to be the joint work of the London and Belfast governments. According to the declaration, every citizen in the North was "entitled to the same equality of treatment and freedom from discrimination as obtains in the rest of the United Kingdom." Just how much this guarantee was worth could be seen later when Northerners were interned without charge or trial in concentration camps like Long Kesh and Magilligan and handed over to the military torturers, while British troops smashed up Nationalist homes and called women "Fenian bitches."

There was bitter indignation among the rank and file of the IRA when the leadership made support for the retention of Stormont part of its official policy. "The Border is not an issue," the Downing Street Declaration had arrogantly said. How could the revisionists uphold Stormont without conceding the same thing?

A feeling of grim determination could now be sensed among the IRA volunteers. The leadership should have sensed it and gone cautiously, knowing that it is very foolish to oppose intense patriotic emotions with far-fetched political theories.

But they did not. Instead, the revisionists pushed on, defeating my every hope that the events of August 1969 might yet pull the movement together and that somehow we would avoid a split, and close our ranks.

I was instructed to hand over the base on the border to the area

adjutant and came south again. Returning, I found that most of the Southern leadership did not realise that the trouble was not over and could quickly break out again. The Northerners, on the other hand, knowing the situation in their own areas from A to Z, were very much aware that there could be further serious flare-ups at any time. The crying need was obviously for reorganisation and regrouping of the movement while this lull lasted, with realistic new military and political policies that would take into account the circumstances that now prevailed.

In the meantime, I had plenty to see to personally. Resuming my duties as Director of Intelligence, I immediately left for the North again. Arriving at a house in Belfast, I was coolly received. After a while I was told, "You're the only effing one of that Dublin crowd we want to see up here. If it had been anyone else from HQ he'd probably have been shot."

I urged the battalion staff as well as the older men in the new auxiliary units that had been formed for street defence, at all costs not to fall out among themselves. Of all places, Belfast had to make every conceivable effort to prevent a split if this was at all possible.

But it wasn't. Division had started already. Some of the younger volunteers, together with Republican veterans of the 'forties campaign, put an ultimatum to the Belfast OC. They would have nothing more to do with Dublin HQ until the revisionists who had left them in the lurch were dropped from the leadership.

When I called at the house of the OC, he informed me that a compromise had been reached. The Belfast staff had been enlarged, and representatives of those who had presented the ultimatum had been co-opted on to it. But they were having no more to do with Dublin.

I was asked to take this message to Cathal Goulding. This I did, but I had to return to Belfast the following day with a request for the OC and the new representatives to meet Goulding. This was agreed to. On my way back to Dublin afterwards, I was stopped by a British army patrol at a roadblock just north of Newry. They didn't search the car, but politely asked my name, where I was coming from and where I was going. Little did they know how much the mission I was on would later affect all of us.

Around the end of August it was decided that a Northern Defence Fund would be established to enable Republicans there to purchase equipment. Meanwhile a great variety of stuff had been collected

from the South and sent up. The HQ dumps, such as they were, had been cleared out and their contents dispatched.

Efforts were made to obtain new or second-hand equipment, and throughout August local defence committees sprang up like mushrooms in the North. They were generally not affiliated to the Republican movement and did not even follow a common pattern. In Belfast they were known as the Citizens' Defence Committees. In other places they called themselves defence units. The equipment problem became more serious and more involved. When I arrived back from the border base, one of the things I had to do, in addition to duties as intelligence chief, was to approach people for subscriptions to the Northern Defence Fund.

Needless to say, I wasn't looking for fivers or tenners. Selecting a list of prospective subscribers with great care, I succeeded in obtaining several large donations. But when in September the Army Council received a report on the defence fund which then stood at a healthy five-figure sum, they proposed that it should all be used for the general finances of the movement.

Jumping out of my chair at the meeting, I walked up and down the room protesting at this proposal. Eventually they agreed that less than half of what had been collected would be reserved for the purpose for which it had been subscribed — defence of the Northern Nationalist districts. But the first ten thousand pounds would be put into the general funds of the movement.

I protested angrily against this, insisting that my protest be recorded in the minutes of the meeting. Immediately afterwards I contacted a number of people who had pledged substantial sums for the defence fund and told them to hold on to their money for the time being, explaining my reasons. Several months later I was able to approach them again, and they were to be very generous to the Provisional Army Council. It should be said that none of these people was involved in any political organisation whatsoever, and I doubt if any ever will be. They were simply well-off citizens who felt a financial obligation to do what they could to help provide the Northerners with the means of defence. In particular, they were not connected with Fianna Fáil or with Taca, that party's fund-raising group. They were successful businessmen who would not have touched either of those organisations with a barge-pole.

This incident was about the last straw as far as I was concerned. On top of the attempt to divert the Northern fund to other uses, I

learned that autumn that the revisionists in the leadership had decided on the one step common sense demanded we should all avoid. They resurrected the very proposals that had led to the dissension, with the intention of forcing them through at a forthcoming extraordinary Convention by the Republican Army.

I had spent three or four years trying to keep the IRA from splitting. Now, finally, I lost all faith and confidence in the leadership that had led us to disgrace and disaster and was now about to provoke an even greater misfortune.

There was no hope of preventing the split by then. I urged the Belfast men to maintain unity there even if the worst happened at the Convention. But I knew there was little hope even there because of the secret dealings between their OC at that time and the revisionists at HQ. Contrary to this agreement with his own staff to have no more to do with Dublin, he was meeting them.

I had one remaining chance to speak my mind in private to some of those who had brought us to this pass, and I took it. At a meeting of the twelve-man executive, I expressed my feelings so angrily that I struck the table with my fist while doing so. Some of my friends implored me to "cool it." But there was no longer any point in patience. We all knew that when the Convention assembled, the long-feared split would be inevitable and the Republican Army would break apart, while the North remained like a volcano waiting for the next eruption.

A joint commission composed of members of the Republican Army and of Sinn Féin agreed to the revisionist proposals. They were then put to the artificially packed twenty-man Army Council in late October. Although they were formally approved by twelve votes to eight, in the old seven-man Council it would have been touch and go.

As a member of that commission, I produced a minority report dissenting from the proposals and calling on the Republican movement to cease contesting parliamentary elections altogether.

In December, almost on the eve of the critical Convention, I was summoned to a special meeting. Direct overtures were made to me to sink my differences with the revisionists.

This I refused to do. Instead, I countered with a proposal of my own. Keep the Army clear from this controversy. Drop the idea of an Extraordinary Convention. Let the proposals go to a free vote at a Sinn Féin Ard Fheis. If they were passed, those of us who disagreed with them would leave Sinn Féin and concentrate entirely on the Army.

It was my last desperate attempt to avoid a split in the IRA itself. It was abruptly rejected. One of those present then asked me, "And what about your responsibility to the Republican movement?" Not only would the Army be split, he said. There was the question of Cumann Cabrach, the fund for prisoners' dependants, of the Republican newspaper, and many other aspects and activities that would all be affected.

"What about the responsibility of you people to the Republican movement?" I replied. "Here we are with a crisis on our hands, yet you have proceeded hell-bent to push these proposals, regardless of whether they caused a split or not."

Then I turned and spoke directly to Cathal Goulding, who had been listening.

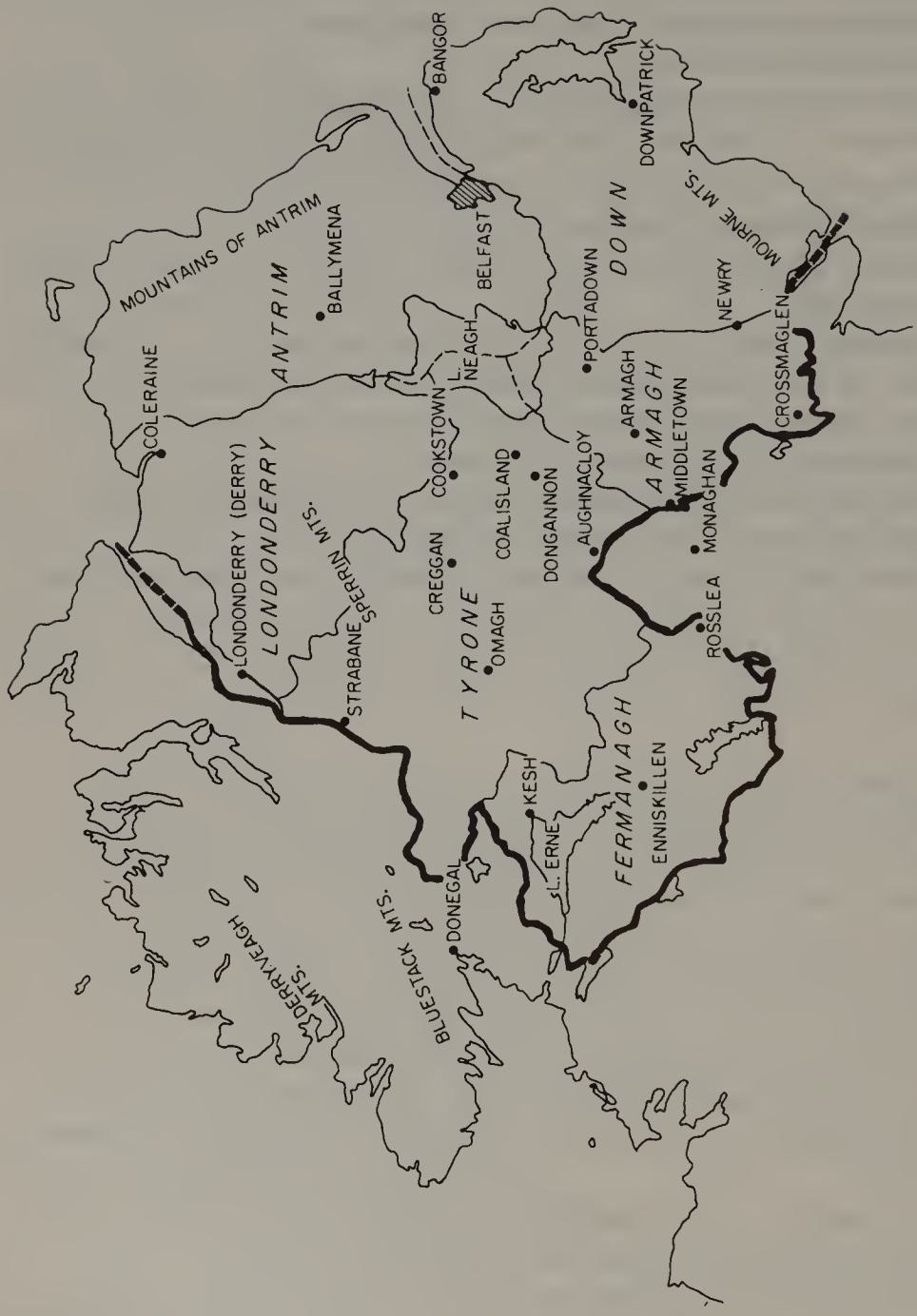
"Cathal," I said, "you are now the only person who could prevent a split. If you withdrew your support from these proposals, even at this late stage, it would save the day."

"That's out of the question," he said.

"In that case," I answered, "a split is absolutely inevitable. I only hope it will not lead to clashes between us."

With that, I stood up and asked permission to leave the meeting.

The Six Counties



Chapter 9

The Provisionals

The Extraordinary Army Convention that finally divided the IRA was held in the middle of December 1969. The place was an isolated country village, and it was a wet, dirty evening when I set out. The proceedings would begin late at night and go on into the small hours of the morning. I had no illusions about the seriousness of the situation I would be facing, nor had those who shared my views about what we must do.

We had already planned our next moves. We knew that the leadership would do everything possible to secure a majority for their proposals to reduce the IRA to a cog in a Marxist political machine. If they got the proposals through, we would act swiftly and effectively to regroup and reorganise the Republican movement. We would come straight from the convention and reassemble at a prearranged rendezvous to assume our new tasks. I would have a change of cars and a driver waiting for me, and immediately afterwards I would head for Belfast.

When I reached the convention, there was an unmistakable air of tension. Men who were normally good-humoured appeared quiet and strained. I went in and looked around. The place was well packed with delegates, and indeed "packed" is the right word. The leadership had made an all-out effort to drum up maximum support. "Have you left anyone behind at all?" I asked one of them.

But I noticed immediately that several delegates who were strongly against the proposed changes were missing, in particular a group from Munster I had confidently expected to see there. It turned out that this was no accident. There were many other irregularities that made the convention unrepresentative of opinion

in the Army as a whole. Nevertheless, I thought, "I can't go through another year of this bickering." The convention was called to order and the session that was to destroy our long comradeship began.

There were two crucial resolutions. The first was that the IRA should enter into a "National Liberation Front" in close co-operation with organisations of the "radical left." The second was that the Republican movement should end its policy of parliamentary abstention. This meant in effect that the Army should give its blessing to the abolition of this policy by Sinn Féin.

We tried to have the two resolutions taken in the reverse order. If the one about a National Liberation Front came up first, we would be swamped with theoretical arguments and many delegates' minds would be going round in circles by the time we got to the key resolution. It was the parliamentary proposal that presented the clear-cut issue for all Republicans, who had now to choose between accepting the institutions of partition or upholding the basic Republican principle of Ireland's right to national unity.

But the chairman ruled "no" to our request. We then insisted that a two-thirds majority would be necessary for changes of such a sweeping nature. After some discussion he ruled this out too and said that a simple majority would be sufficient. So, with the revisionist advantage further strengthened by these rulings, the convention moved on to the opening business.

This was a report from the Chief of Staff. It referred to the events of August in such a way as to claim undeserved credit for HQ. It implied, for instance, that they had been responsible for all the weapons collected and issued to the Northern units. Considering how I had had to clear out that HQ dump on my own initiative, I didn't think much of this pretence.

By now delegates had separated into two definite groups. From then on, those of us who were against the proposals were careful to keep close together. During an adjournment we decided that we would not take part in the discussion or voting on the first resolution, to set up the "National Liberation Front." When the convention resumed and we adopted this tactic, there were several appeals from the chairman and the floor that we should participate, but we ignored them.

This so-called "alliance with the radical left" was a political fantasy. In the first place, there was a contradiction between the supposed aims of the two resolutions. The idea of abolishing the

parliamentary abstention policy was to enable Republicans to take their seats if they won elections. But in Ireland the "radical left" had never had a cat's chance in elections. In fact, it hardly existed. The organisations which the proposed National Liberation Front had in mind were the Connolly Association, the Communist Party of Northern Ireland and the tiny Irish Workers' Party. The civil rights people had got so fed up with these groups that they had been pushing them out of their movement because, as Bernadette Devlin correctly pointed out, "The communists, particularly in Northern Ireland, are as reactionary as the Unionists." Instead of developing the revolutionary impulse, they had been trying to hold it back. As for their political chances in the South, the best-known Irish communist candidate had stood in four elections, polling four hundred and sixty-six votes on one occasion and a hundred and eighty-three on another.

This ideological alliance with the left was only one of the five reasons for the split. The other issues were abstentionism, military policy, the maintenance of internal discipline in the movement, and since August 1969 the question of whether to campaign for the abolition of Stormont or for its retention.

Certainly as revolutionaries we were automatically anti-capitalist. But we refused to have anything to do with any communist organisation in Ireland; on the basis of their ineffectiveness, their reactionary foot-dragging on the national question and their opposition to armed struggle. We opposed the extreme socialism of the revisionists because we believed that its aim was a Marxist dictatorship, which would be no more acceptable to us than British imperialism or Free State capitalism. Indeed, a leading member of the NLF in Belfast later spoke of "a period of military dictatorship" to follow a British withdrawal. We maintained that every country must travel its own road to the kind of socialism that suits it best. Ours should be the democratic socialism that was preached and practised by the men of 1916.

As to Stormont, the revisionists' campaign to retain it was based on the strange argument that it was an Irish institution. But better Irish institutions could be built, and would have to be. Immediately after the split, when our own group came into existence as a separate force, we made the abolition of Stormont one of our primary military and political objectives.

I have spelled out these issues and shown how they arose simply to

emphasise that these, and nothing else, were the reasons that were about to divide the IRA just before voting began in that vital convention before Christmas 1969. It has been alleged that the cause was personal differences between myself, Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Dave O'Connell on one side, and Cathal Goulding, Séamus Costello and Tomás MacGiolla on the other. This is not true. As I have already stressed, I got on better personally with some of the revisionist leaders than with some of those who went the same way as myself.

When the vote was taken on the first resolution, the revisionist leadership obtained a majority. The National Liberation Front had been voted into existence, for whatever it was worth.

We went on to the second resolution. After five years of discontent and dispute, it had all come to a head with a few lines on an agenda paper. I was the last to speak, urging the convention to reject the proposal. When I finished, one delegate got up and said he hoped I would reconsider. But the chairman proceeded to take the vote, and on a show of hands, the resolution was approved. Men who had joined the movement to reunite their nation had opted to participate in the institutions of partition.

There is a legend that I burst into tears when the vote was announced, saying, "This is the end of the IRA." I did no such thing. In fact, considering the implications for the entire movement, the atmosphere was remarkably unemotional and the arguments for and against the proposal were put quite dispassionately. What I said, while speaking against it, was that if this proposal were passed those who accepted it would forfeit the right to describe themselves as the Irish Republican Army.

I have read accounts which claimed that we who had voted against the revisionists then withdrew from the convention. This is equally untrue. We remained to the end. During a second adjournment we kept together, discussing tactics. The election of an Executive still had to be dealt with, and I of course was an outgoing member of the leadership. However, we decided that none of us would stand for election or take part in the voting.

When we reassembled we refused to accept the ballot papers. But to my surprise some of the revisionists proposed me for the new Executive. I naturally declined to let my name go forward. They completed the election of the members, and shortly afterwards the convention concluded.

Goulding himself showed no hostility. After the convention he asked me what I planned to do in the coming year. I think he knew well enough, but I wasn't forthcoming. "Well," he said, "I hope you'll have a talk with me before you do anything."

But it was too late for that. Our group drove to the prearranged rendezvous and held the meeting we had planned. The mood of this meeting was in strong contrast to the tension and antagonisms of the convention. We knew what had to be done and were keen to get on with the job.

Now, to all intents and purposes, there was no longer an IRA. There was an NLF (which the media, with little regard for the facts, were to christen the "official IRA"). And there were ourselves. But we had no leadership and no status until we could reconvene Army delegates in a proper manner and repudiate the decisions taken at that packed and irregular extraordinary convention. The task facing us now was nothing less than reorganising the Republican movement.

When I came out it was already daylight, a grey December morning. I was starving. The car I expected was waiting. There was a cold chicken wrapped up inside.

"Belfast," I said to the driver. On the journey up I ate the chicken and fell asleep.

In Belfast I spoke to a gathering of twenty Republicans. We agreed that a new structure would be set up in the Northern capital. This was regrettable but unavoidable. They went out to win the allegiance of the various units. By our next preliminary meeting to discuss progress, we had seven out of the thirteen Belfast units. Shortly afterwards, when we held a special convention to agree on formal arrangements, we had nine of them. A new Belfast OC had been appointed and a new Battalion staff elected.

Those who met in this special convention included the delegates who had voted against the NLF, delegates who had been refused admission on that occasion, others from units which the revisionists had not even contacted, and of course those representing our comrades in Belfast itself. We got through a considerable amount of business in a very down-to-earth manner.

Our first task was to repudiate the compromising proposals which the other convention had passed, and this was duly done. We pledged our allegiance to the thirty-two-county Irish Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916 and established by Dáil Éireann, the Irish parliament, in 1919.

Next, we discussed the reorganisation of the movement. The first necessary step was to form an accepted leadership. We elected a Provisional Executive of twelve. These then withdrew and elected a Provisional Army Council of seven.

I should explain the original meaning of the term "Provisional." Because of the circumstances I have mentioned, the exclusion of delegates and the many other irregularities, we maintained that the extraordinary convention had been improperly convened and the decisions taken by it therefore not irrevocable. It remained to be seen how the units themselves would react to what had happened when the impact sank in fully throughout the country. In the meantime, we agreed that another convention would be held, if possible within six months but in any event not later than twelve months, to regularise the leadership position. Pending this, the newly elected Army Council and Executive were, quite accurately, regarded as provisional bodies.

The last decision taken by the Provisional Army Council that day was to appoint a Chief of Staff. Their choice was unanimous. I left the convention with a greater responsibility in the movement than ever.

So there I was just before Christmas 1969 with an organisation that was only a nucleus. Outside Belfast, the battalions were very much paper battalions. The strength of a company varied from twelve to forty volunteers. But manpower was not the worst problem. Allegiance was given at a heartening rate. By mid-January, for example, there were nine units in Belfast, five in Armagh, four in Down, three in Tyrone, two in Fermanagh, two in County Derry, one in Derry city and one in south-west Antrim. Units in most other counties were nowhere near as strong.

The real problem was resources. We had five years of neglect to make up for as quickly as possible. There was very little equipment in the units, and practically none to form a reserve. As for funds, I emerged from that special convention in the uncomfortable knowledge that the kitty contained exactly one hundred and five pounds. One of the Belfast delegates had provided a hundred of it, and another delegate contributed a fiver.

That was the cold reality of our situation then. It was a very long way from the myth that the Fianna Fáil party in Dublin had provided thousands of pounds in secret finance to create and equip a so-called "Northern Command" of the IRA.

Various Fianna Fáil politicians and businessmen connected with the party were supposed to have brought about the split in the IRA, offering to set up the "Northern Command" on condition that it had nothing to do with socialist policies and operated only in the North. According to an anonymous document entitled *Fianna Fáil and the IRA*, the new organisation was to "become an armed wing of Fianna Fáil operating exclusively in the Six County area as a prelude to Fianna Fáil political control there."

This fairy-tale was part of the 1970 political scandal which had something of the effect in Ireland that Watergate has had in the United States. So far, half-a-dozen books have dealt with that crisis, the arms trial and the Dáil inquiries that followed. But none has been able to disclose convincing details of the deal between Fianna Fáil and the IRA. There is a good reason for this. It never happened.

Who stood to gain by spreading such a lie? The answer is all too clear. The whole chain of events and sensation that led to the arms trial of 1970 and the departure of Fianna Fáil ministers, civil servants and secretaries was started by the NLF itself.

At the end of October 1969 the editor of the *United Irishman*, Séamus Ó Tuathail, distributed copies of the paper to media representatives at the Gresham Hotel in Dublin. It named three ministers of Lynch's government. They were Kevin Boland (Local Government), Charles Haughey (Finance) and Neil Blaney (Agriculture). It accused them of using Fianna Fáil money to buy over "Civil Rights and anti-Unionist forces." These "anti-Unionist forces" were meant to include the Provisional IRA.

The Marxists had learned something from Marxist experience. When a clash is looming in the leadership over major policy differences, it is standard practice to blame the rival group for plotting with outside interests. Fianna Fáil made an excellent scapegoat for this well-worn procedure. The party was cynically stumbling about trying to get in on the act in the North, *but only to keep itself in power in the South*. Fianna Fáil *had* been running a propaganda sheet called *Voice of the North*. It *had* been providing some degree of aid to the Citizens' Defence Committees. A few businessmen associated with it *were* willing to help these committees to get some arms. But all this was a very different matter from financing a split in the IRA.

The Marxists blew them for their own purposes — to provide a smokescreen and an excuse for the split that was bound to happen

anyway. The Provisional Army Council was not financed by Fianna Fáil. No "Northern Command" was ever set up. Blaney's later claim to have had a hand in the events which brought the Provisional IRA into existence is preposterous. I never met him with Cathal Goulding in 1969, as has been implied in various accounts. But Dave O'Connell did have one meeting with Blaney in August that year. It lasted about a minute, and the conversation was simple.

"Can you supply any guns, Mr. Blaney?"

"I'm sorry. I can't."

"All right. Goodbye."

The famous weapons that led to the arms trial were not intended for the IRA. Early in 1970 we were informed that a consignment of weapons, paid for out of Dublin government funds and meant for the Belfast Defence Committees, would be arriving within a matter of weeks. I had no other information except that the consignment would consist of various types of weapons suitable for defensive action and a considerable quantity of ammunition. I was told that there would be no difficulty about importing the material as all arrangements had been made the previous autumn, prior to the formation of the Provisional Army Council.

My attitude was that if weapons were being imported for defensive purposes in Belfast, well and good, no matter who got them. If, for once, the Dublin politicians were doing the right thing, even with a token amount of help, it was not too early. Even so, I had serious reservations about whether the undertaking would materialise.

The source of the weapons was identified during the arms trial as one Otto Schleuter, a German dealer who had had a bad run with the intelligence services over the years. Captain Kelly, the Dublin government's intelligence officer, went to Germany to arrange matters. When he got back to Dublin he was arrested.

He went on trial with Charles Haughey, John Kelly from Belfast, and Albert Luykx, a Dublin businessman of Belgian origin. They were charged with attempting to import arms illegally. Captain Kelly maintained throughout the trial that anything he did was with the knowledge of his superiors and that he was acting with the authority of the government. This was accepted by the jury that acquitted all four defendants. Lynch sacked Haughey and Blaney from his government, and Boland resigned in protest. The rumours flew all over the place, and the seed sown by the Marxists in the *United Irishman* grew into the legend that has been repeated over the years — that Fianna Fáil created the Provisional IRA.

There is another item of interest about the affair. The mysterious and anonymous document *Fianna Fáil and the IRA* which gave so many details about the “plot” was circulated widely among politicians, police and other people in the know in Dublin. Anyone could get a copy by sending around to the revisionist Sinn Féin offices in Gardiner Place, and later it was actually sold in public outside the General Post Office — by members of the NLF.

As for the “secret finance”, we were coming on to Christmas 1969 with a hundred and five pounds, short of equipment and no reserve. Far from giving us money, as soon as the Provisional Army Council was formed, Fianna Fáil people actually took steps to prevent funds reaching us.

It happened this way. Before the split, occasional payments from funds provided by the Dublin government went to the Finance Officer of the Belfast IRA. But these were never for the IRA itself. As the NLF admitted later, they were for the express purpose of paying men working full-time organising street defence, vigilante patrols against sectarian attack, and similar community duties. The reason for paying them was that if they were out all night protecting their neighbours’ homes they could scarcely work the next day. These small amounts went towards recompensing them for the loss of earnings, in other words to help them feed their families. At the time the Provisional Army Council was formed, the sum concerned was about two hundred pounds a week. It went straight in and out, having to be disbursed as soon as it was received. After the split, these payments were made direct to the Provisional staff in Belfast for distribution. But within five weeks they ceased completely.

There was also the case of Cunamh (Aid), a relief fund set up by Connradh na Gaelige, the Irish language organisation, Ceoltas Ceolteori, the traditional musicians’ association, and the GAA. Some of the defence committees applied to it for grants. But although the fund stood at forty-five thousand pounds, these requests were denied by government supporters among its trustees.

Early in the New Year a government minister warned the Southern public about subscribing to funds “ostensibly set up for relief in the North” as there was a grave danger that these funds might be diverted to illegal purposes. But in fact what was received for relief went to relief. The real point was that this man belonged to the party, Fianna Fáil, whose members had been boasting six months earlier about how much they were doing for Northern defence.

A great deal of money from the Dublin government fund was

meanwhile being spent on making propaganda for itself. A lot went on the propaganda sheet *Voice of the North*, which devoted a lot of space to the De Valera personality cult and reprinted his ancient speeches. We were conscious of our own urgent need for an effective Republican paper to propagate the revolutionary view. But from that February to the following January we could only afford to struggle along with a small eight-page monthly. To cap it all, we soon found ourselves two or three months in debt to the printer, and I was threatened with a civil bill. So much for the “secret finance.”

The first leak of the split appeared in a Fianna Fáil newspaper, the *Sunday Press*, on December 28, 1969. It said that some members of the IRA had “withdrawn” at a convention earlier in the month to form a Provisional Army Council. The leak did not come from our side. But the term “Provisional” caught the public’s attention immediately. It rang a bell in the memory of the Irish people. The men of 1916 had signed the Proclamation as the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic.

That day the Provisional Council’s first public statement was issued through the reorganised Republican Publicity Bureau.

Arising out of reports in a Dublin Sunday newspaper today, it has been found necessary to clarify the position of the Irish Republican Army.

In view of a decision by a majority of delegates at an unrepresentative convention of the Irish Republican Army to recognise the British, Six County and Twenty-Six County parliaments, we the minority of delegates at that convention, together with the delegates denied admission, and the representatives of the areas including Belfast which had already withdrawn allegiance from Army control, having reassembled in convention do hereby repudiate those compromising decisions and reaffirm the fundamental Republican position.

We declare our allegiance to the Thirty-Two County Irish Republic proclaimed at Easter 1916, established by the first Dáil Eireann in 1919, overthrown by force of arms in 1922, and suppressed to this day by the British-imposed Six County and Twenty-Six County partitionist states.

Already a majority of Army units, individual volunteers and Republicans generally have given their allegiance to the Provisional Executive and Provisional Army Council elected by us at

this convention, and have rejected the new compromising leadership, in the election of which we did not even participate.

The adoption of the compromising policy referred to is the logical outcome of an obsession in recent years with parliamentary politics, with the consequent undermining of the basic military role of the Irish Republican Army. The failure to provide the maximum defence possible of our people in Belfast and other parts of the Six Counties against the forces of British imperialism last August is ample evidence of this neglect.

We call upon the Irish people at home and in exile for increased support towards defending our people in the North and the eventual achievement of the full political, social, economic and cultural freedom of Ireland.

The modern guerrilla army to become known the world over as the Provisional IRA had spoken for the first time.

Chapter 10

Facing the Storm

The year 1970 began quietly, but it was a false calm. Early in January the Provisional Army Council met to decide military policy for the reorganised movement. It was not yet in a position to force the pace of events. At least to begin with, the best strategy would be one of response. As the Unionist power structure continued to crack up, Loyalist tension would go on increasing between the limited reformists and the extreme reactionaries. That in itself would produce a dangerous situation. At the same time, after the experiences of August, there was fierce determination among Nationalists that never again would they submit to Unionist misrule and single-party sectarian dictatorship. There was therefore instability in both the state system and the social system, and on top of it all a growing counter-revolutionary threat from the Loyalist right wing. They were now running in considerable quantities of arms in addition to the thousands of licensed and unlicensed weapons they had already. A good deal of this stuff was coming across from Scotland in trawlers and ordinary container traffic, there of course being no customs control between the North and the British mainland. Both the Dublin and London governments were warned again and again that the trouble was by no means over, but in spite of this, a foolish optimism seemed to be the order of the day.

It was in this context, with the summer marching season of 1970 as the most likely flashpoint, that IRA strategy had to be determined. At the council meeting in January it was agreed that the most urgent priority would be area defence. All our energies would be devoted to providing material, financial and training assistance for the Northern units. The objective was to ensure that if any area

where such a unit existed came under attack, whether from Loyalist extremists or British forces, that unit would now be capable of adequate defensive action.

As soon as it became feasible and practical, the IRA would move from a purely defensive position into a phase of combined defence and retaliation. Should British troops ill-treat or kill civilians, counter-operations would be undertaken when the Republican units had the capability. After a sufficient period of preparation, when the movement was considered strong enough and the circumstances ripe, it would go into the third phase, launching all-out offensive action against the British occupation system. It was also agreed that selective sabotage operations would be carried out, at the discretion of the national and local leadership, in the Northern areas concerned.

This policy was the only realistic one in keeping with the situation in Ireland at the beginning of 1970. While its ultimate objective was the basic Republican goal of ending British rule in any part of Ireland, its immediate aim was to organise firepower for the streets and districts under the greatest threat. The British could not be trusted to provide sure protection, in spite of their talk about "our boys holding the ring." They had appeared in Derry only when it was clear that the RUC invasion of the Bogside was a failure, and their troops had not prevented the previous Belfast pogroms in the 'twenties and 'thirties. The British army, with its imperial mentality, thought in terms of riot control, not modern peacekeeping duties, in which it had little or no experience.

As for hopes of a United Nations peacekeeping force, the Dublin government's call for such a move was merely a piece of political cynicism. Lynch went through the motions of sending Dr. Hillery, his Minister for External Affairs, to New York to ask for a Security Council debate and request UN troops for the North. James Callaghan, then British Home Secretary, disclosed what went on. The British agreed to Hillery making what Callaghan called "a moderately phrased speech" which they knew in advance would not embarrass them. Though some Afro-Asian delegates were in favour of a debate, the Security Council understandably did not react to Hillery's watered-down appeal. The Fianna Fáil party were exploiting the threatened Nationalists to build up political capital in the South.

The first phase of the Provisional Army Council's strategy was based on the three-tier defence structure that had emerged after the previous August. The first tier was the regular units of the IRA itself,

reinforced by the increasing number of Republican volunteers giving their allegiance to the new Council. These units would be available for either defensive or offensive action in any area. The second tier was the auxiliary units. These were composed of men of all ages, including some former members of the IRA, who for various reasons were not prepared to join a regular unit. The function of the auxiliaries was solely defensive, but they would have a certain amount of mobility to operate in threatened areas other than their own and stiffen resistance where required. The third tier was the units of the local defence committees. These were entirely for community defence of their own districts, parishes or streets. In the event of attack, all three tiers would come under the command of the IRA local area OC.

When the Provisional Army Council came into being, the arms situation was chaotic. Before the reorganisation, representatives of the local defence committees had been forced to seek equipment and supplies on their own from any sources willing to provide (or promise) them. Many of these sources saw a chance to cash in, and some groups and auxiliary units had been paying exorbitant prices. It may surprise Loyalists to learn that some Protestant dealers in the commercial arms trade in the North had no objections to supplying weapons and ammunition to these representatives if they were able to pay what was asked.

Before 1969, fifteen pounds was the most that such a dealer would have been paid for a revolver. Now they were asking, and getting, forty. Many of those revolvers were pretty ancient .455 models, some even dating from the previous century.

The way to rationalise the arms situation was to reduce competition among the Northern representatives, because as long as the scramble lasted the dealers could simply play one unit's representative off against another to keep the prices up. If the dealers had to do business with a single buying set-up there was a good chance that competition to sell would bring prices down. After the emergence of the Provisional Army Council, one of the first things done was to appoint a Supply Department under a Quartermaster-General. For security, they operated as a watertight section, keeping details of those they dealt with very much to themselves. As a rule, the only times I would hear from them were when something went wrong or they needed money for a deal. Their most immediate job was to channel what supplies were obtainable into the movement. Then

equipment for defence could be distributed on the basis of an area's need rather than availability of cash.

Besides the Quartermaster-General, a Director of Training was appointed. Within another few days an Adjutant-General and a Director of Finance were named, and instructions were issued to all units to hand over ninety per cent of their funds and equipment for the Northern priority. Tribute is overdue to the Southern units for their quick and ungrudging reaction to these instructions. Some handed over every penny they had. By mid-January well over two thousand pounds had come in from the volunteers in the South.

As for equipment, three dumps supposed to be under NLF control were immediately handed over to the Provisional Army Council. If we had known where these arms were we would have raided for them, but in these three cases there was no need to. My word was given that none of these arms would remain in the South. As a result, a few dozen submachine-guns and many rifles and pistols were removed from these dumps and quickly distributed in Belfast and elsewhere. Getting a sub had a great effect on the spirit of the units which had been down in the mouth about their shortage of firepower.

All equipment transferred or rounded up was checked, repaired if necessary and then rechecked to make sure it was in serviceable condition before being issued. A dud firing-pin or a kinked spring discovered too late could be a death-warrant for whoever might have the weapon when the attack came.

I now set out to renew contact with the well disposed businessmen who had offered me contributions towards Northern defence before the split, but whom I had asked to wait. When I went back to these men, very few of them held out. As usually happens in real life, the sums involved were nowhere near those mentioned in the various political and journalistic fairy-tales later on. But I was damn glad to get them.

For about two years, the most I ever got from anyone was a thousand pounds. Bit by bit, we built up contributions and continued our efforts to track down items of equipment. Finally, after several months, the supply situation at last improved, and we were able to assemble a reserve.

The split did not take place without bad blood. There were hotheads on both sides who did not help matters by taking unofficial action.

Early in January some members of the NLF made an attempt to lure me to Dublin. A young man known to me as an organiser before the split called to my house. Pretending to Mary that he was sympathetic to the Provisionals, he said that it was important that I should meet him the following afternoon. The place he named was a pub around the corner from the office of the *United Irishman*, which now spoke for nobody but the NLF.

The young man seemed to Mary to be nervous and on edge. Suspicious both of his demeanour and the message, she told him he ought to know that I didn't frequent pubs and that I no longer had any business in that neighbourhood.

I was out until the early hours of next morning. Mary told me of the proposed rendezvous, but I did not turn up. I was fairly sure that an attempt would have been made to kidnap me. If it had succeeded, the result would have been a warning and a severe beating-up, or possibly even my liquidation. I do not believe that Goulding knew or would have approved of this plan to set me up. I was convinced that it was unofficial action by the so-called "officials" of the NLF.

A week or so afterwards I was extremely annoyed at unauthorised action by hotheads on our own side. It was reported to me that two of them had appeared while the NLF Dublin unit was holding a parade, produced pistols and lined everybody up to be frisked. Before leaving, they took upon themselves to warn the NLF that the Republican movement was being reorganised in Dublin, and not to interfere. Neither side was therefore in a position to complain about unofficial actions, and matters were allowed to drop.

Military policy having been agreed, and a start made on putting it into effect, our immediate political preoccupation now was with Sinn Féin and the forthcoming Ard Fheis. The revisionists would be submitting to the Sinn Féin delegates the same proposals which had split the IRA at the Extraordinary Army Convention in December. Several of the Provisional Army Council were Sinn Féin members too, and I was one of the outgoing Ard Comhairle. If we managed to get the Ard Fheis to reject the NLF proposals, the greater part of the movement might still be pulled back from the brink.

But we could not prevent those in Dublin from using similar tactics to those they had resorted to before the decisive Army convention. I believe to this day that Sinn Féin cumainn known to favour the proposals were allowed to send more than their fair share of delegates to the Intercontinental Hotel in Dublin on January 10.

When the Ard Fheis opened, only two-fifths of the delegates and half the visitors entitled to speak were against the proposals.

On the Saturday the resolution establishing a "National Liberation Front" was carried. On the Sunday morning, Tomás MacGiolla, in his address as outgoing president of Sinn Féin, appealed for unity. When the presidential address came up for debate, with the press present, I saw an opportunity to get across the fact that supporters of the Provisional Army Council were strongly represented there. I rose and said that for unity to exist, there first had to be a basis for it. If the fundamental Republican position were to be abandoned at that Ard Fheis, there clearly could be no basis for the unity he asked for.

The marathon debate on the proposal to remove all restrictions on parliamentary participation then began. But the revisionists failed to get the necessary two-thirds majority. A great cheer went up from the Republican section when the result was announced.

The revisionists still had room left to manoeuvre. Before the tea break, two of them got up and proposed a vote of allegiance to the Army Council, by which they meant the NLF leadership. We could not allow ourselves to be present when this vote was taken. To forestall this situation, I got to the microphone, got the floor and pledged my own allegiance to the Provisional Army Council, who I said were now the only people entitled to call themselves the IRA.

With that, I turned to our people and said, "Now lads, it's time for us to leave."

From the Intercontinental over a hundred of us went to a hall in Parnell Square, where we formed what was to be known as the Sinn Féin Caretaker Executive. Its first act was to pass a resolution pledging allegiance to the All-Ireland Republic and support for the Provisional Council. It was agreed that a new Republican paper, *An Phoblacht* (The Republic), would be published as soon as possible.

Representatives met the Executive of Cumann na mBán, the women's section of the Republican movement, an organisation which over the years never had much time for deviations from the goal of total Irish freedom. Just as it had unanimously opposed the partitionist Treaty of 1921, its present-day Executive now unanimously decided to accept the authority of the Provisional Army Council.

The break in the movement was now complete.

From January 1970 we worked at a tremendous pace. Our people

in the North urged us constantly to be ready for the summer. They were convinced that trouble would break out again with the Orange marching season, and it would be more severe and widespread. Every round of ammunition that could be found was being sent up. Every scrap of energy went into organisation and preparation.

Fit as I was, I began to feel the effects of this pace. I would leave home in the morning and spend the day and night in and out of my car almost always driving myself. I was making calls to keep my own job going, checking progress in the movement, listening to suggestions, exploring new contacts, studying information about the North, watching the political news carefully, planning, discussing, deciding and then getting home to fall into bed for a few hours of sleep before heading off again next morning.

We were also looking to the Irish abroad. Towards the end of February we sent a statement of policy to Republicans in the United States, Canada and elsewhere. We told them that the Republican movement had been reorganised on a three-point basis: no deviation from the fundamental Republican position, no compromise with communist or communist-controlled organisations, and all possible help for Republicans in the North. This was accepted by individuals and groups in North America who later gave their allegiance to the Provisional Army Council, doing trojan work there for the Irish cause.

At the beginning of April an early warning of what was coming spurred us to hasten our preparations. In Belfast there had been some coat-trailing by Orange bands which had marched through largely Nationalist areas despite residents' objections. The British army arrived, and as a result of the troops' behaviour rioting erupted in Ballymurphy. It lasted for three days. Barricades went up, the people came out to defend their homes and families. The army fired huge quantities of CS gas, regardless of the many children and old people in the houses. Petrol bombs were extensively used by the defenders. This led to the British GOC, General Freeland, issuing a public warning that petrol bombers could be shot and that troops might be told to shoot to kill.

The "honeymoon" was certainly over now. The Labour government at Westminster appeared to abandon the pretence of "peace-keeping." Riot control was to be attempted by the only method they knew about, straight armed force.

We were not surprised. At least matters were out in the open at

last. A counter-warning was immediately issued that if Freeland's troops carried out this threat, retaliatory action would be taken by the Republican units in occupied Ireland.

At that stage we were not seeking a confrontation with the British army. The reorganised IRA was still very much in its infancy. We knew quite well that there were not the resources to keep up intensive action for any lengthy period. What there was would be better kept for defensive purposes in the much more serious confrontation that everyone on the spot predicted would come that summer.

Debris was lying around the roads of the Ballymurphy area when I toured it with Joe Cahill, inspecting outposts at 4.30 in the morning. I was impressed by the alertness of the men on the defences. Not once did they fail to give the alarm as we approached.

Their vigilance was justified. The trouble we had long expected broke out at the end of June. Dave O'Connell, Ruairí O Brádaigh, myself and many other prominent Republicans were in Belfast that weekend for the funeral of Hugh McAteer, who had been Chief of Staff of the IRA in the 1940s and had died suddenly. A number of Orange processions were due to take place that day. The delighted Orangemen would be celebrating the victory of their Tory allies in the Westminster general election. In addition, having just been re-elected to Westminster Parliament, Bernadette Devlin had been imprisoned the previous day, a stupid piece of timing which had provoked widespread anger and protests.

The Belfast staff said they were going to have their hands full. They would not be able to spare the men or the time to provide protection for the visitors. They were hoping that clashes with the UVF or the Orangemen could be avoided, but they were leaving nothing to chance. They wanted to go off and supervise their defensive measures, and also to ensure that nobody on our side was likely to take precipitate action which could ignite the whole situation.

My own inclination was to stay on the spot. But in line with usual military practice when visiting a local commander's area, I had to defer to their wishes. They had not exaggerated. By the time I got back that Saturday, I received a report that there had been outbreaks in several parts of Belfast, on the Springfield Road, in the Ardoyne and, above all, in Ballymacarret, across the River Lagan in east Belfast. More than a hundred fires were started, including a determined attempt to burn the Catholic church in Ballymacarret.

That situation would have grown worse had the local IRA and auxiliary units and the defence organisation groups not been mobilised and ready. The units on the east side put up a tremendous fight, inflicting heavy casualties on the attackers, an armed Protestant mob who proved to have been organised and led by the UVF.

The defenders suffered too. An auxiliary volunteer, Henry McIlhone, was killed. Several other men were wounded, including a senior Belfast officer.

There were three nights of fighting in Derry as well, though this had more to do with indignation over the Devlin affair. When the outbreaks ended, combined casualties in the two cities were six dead and over two hundred injured. The British army had saturated the entire areas with unbelievable concentrations of CS gas, which several scientists protested was not intended to be used in such density. But the Bogsideers had given as good as they got, and thirty-eight soldiers were injured there.

In Belfast, on the other hand, most of the injured were Loyalist extremists. They had attacked on a serious scale, causing half a million pounds worth of damage. Our scepticism about the British army protecting the Nationalist districts had been well founded.

All the effort and preparation of the past few months had been one hundred per cent justified. I can personally testify that our volunteers derived no satisfaction from the serious casualties they had been forced to inflict on fellow-Irishmen. However, it is clear that the effective defence on the night of June 27–28, 1970 prevented more casualties than it directly caused. If the attacks had not been beaten off, loss of life would undoubtedly have been much higher as the pogrom and arson spread. The Orangemen would have succeeded in their fifty-year objective of driving the Catholics from this east Belfast area altogether. As it was, the shock and cost were to keep the Loyalist extremists quiet all the following summer, in fact for more than another year.

With the return of a Tory British government, the Unionists thought they were in the saddle again. Their Westminster seats formed a sizeable part of Prime Minister Heath's parliamentary majority. They believed they could trade on this to make him prop up Stormont with harsher military measures. Speculation arose that internment without trial was about to be introduced, and the Unionists set up a howl for revenge against the defenders of the Nationalist areas.

What happened next has several possible explanations. On the afternoon of Friday, July 3 the British army made its notorious swoop into the Lower Falls area. It may be that British intelligence did not then fully understand the fundamental policy differences that separated the so-called "officials" and the Provisional Army Council, or that the NLF did not in fact represent anything more serious than revolution by talk and theory. The Lower Falls was the major NLF stronghold in Belfast. They certainly were not going to find the defenders of Ballymacarret or the Ardoyne down there.

What they found instead, while searching a house in Balkan Street apparently on a tip-off, was some arms belonging to the NLF. As the soldiers came out, a crowd had gathered. When they refused to disperse, an armoured personnel carrier reversed into them and crushed a man to death. The "peacekeepers" had set off another disaster.

Rounds of CS gas started to fly. An NLF unit appeared, opening fire on the troops, and what was known as the battle of the Lower Falls began. It quickly escalated. The British brought in hundreds of troops with armoured cars, sealed off the area and began to saturate it with gas. A helicopter flew overhead, directing operations.

That evening a total curfew was imposed on the area by Freeland, the British GOC in the North. People were confined to their homes from Friday night to Sunday morning, a period of thirty-six hours, with only one break of two hours. Many ran out of food. Mothers could not get milk for babies. The gas continued to rain down, and humanitarian appeals from clergy about the risk to children and old people were ignored.

The Provisional IRA, not at first involved, gradually came into defensive engagements with British troops. Outside the Falls, diversionary actions were carried out in various parts of Belfast. A bank was blown up in Andersonstown, and a unit which took up ambush positions opened fire on a reconnaissance patrol which arrived to investigate, wounding two soldiers.

But these operations did not relieve the pressure on the Lower Falls. The British had allocated three thousand troops for the seal-and-search operation, and it was obvious now that they were not going to be drawn off. Freeland put the boot down with a vengeance, and his troops practically took the district apart in a methodical house-to-house search.

I went to keep an eye on things myself. Changing cars at Lurgan, I

was driven into Belfast by a back road. The main roads around the city were heavily roadblocked. There was no question, as was later claimed, that the situation had arisen through one or two British units on the ground "over-reacting" in the Falls. The whole thing was run to an intricate plan, down to the perimeter road block system around the city itself.

In a school in west Belfast, I met the Brigade staff, discussed the situation with them, and spoke to D company, the Provisional unit in the Lower Falls. They had been in the thick of the fighting, and had been withdrawn to avoid being trapped in the house-to-house British net. In spite of their limited equipment, scarcity of ammunition and previous lack of battle experience, they were responsible for wounding most of the fifteen military casualties officially acknowledged by the British. I paid them my compliments.

Meanwhile, the thirty thousand inhabitants of the gassed, sealed-in area were still without food. Freeland's curfew prevented bread or milk vans coming in to deliver. Mothers with young children were at their wits' end. But the women of Belfast came up with an answer. Under spirited leaders, some but by no means all Republicans, over a thousand women and children marched to the Lower Falls carrying bread, milk and other necessities.

They simply pushed their way in past the troops and distributed the food. When they came out again a good many of the items the troops were searching for left with them, hidden in prams and under coats. This unexpected form of defiance caused an upsurge of sympathetic media interest. A reporter was arrested on the totalitarian-sounding charge of "impeding the army." Publicity world-wide was running against the British, and shortly afterwards they called off the whole operation before it had been completed.

The people of five thousand households had been subjected to deliberate institutionalised terror. The soldiers had obviously been given a free hand. The little houses were smashed up one after another. Floors were ripped out and contemptuously flung aside, fireplaces were wrenched from the walls with crowbars, ceilings brought down in showers of plaster, and doors burst from their hinges. Possessions which working families had saved and sacrificed to acquire were wrecked. Nearly five hundred complaints of looting, brutality and abusive behaviour were laid against soldiers of the Devon and Dorset regiment and the Black Watch, and many were later confirmed in an inquiry. Apart from the man killed by the

armoured carrier, three people were shot dead, a fifth died later and sixty civilians were wounded. Between 4.30 p.m. on the Friday and 9 a.m. on Sunday, the British had fired thousands of rounds of high-velocity ammunition. An official account admitted *sixteen!* Almost four hundred people were arrested, many of them being rushed off to special courts in Belfast.

The main purpose of the British operation had quite clearly been to intimidate the Irish people. The thoroughness of the details, involving three thousand troops, showed that it had been pre-planned. It simply awaited an excuse to be put into effect. If raiding for arms had been the only objective, it would have been more logical to search the areas where there had been fighting, plus a search in a Loyalist area as a pretence of impartiality. Several community leaders had pointed out that there were considerably more weapons in the Shankill Road. Both Unionist bosses and the generals saw the Lower Falls as a suitable area for what they had in mind. They could make an example of it and conduct an experiment at the same time.

In the jargon of modern warfare, a “psycho-social target” is a limited area which is selected for the purpose of trying to break the entire population’s morale. The Lower Falls appeared to present such a target. The Ulster Defence Regiment, the new successors to the disbanded B-specials, came out to take a hand and were used to set up the roadblocks in and around Belfast, releasing British troops to descend in force on the Falls.

The operation also provided an opportunity to test something else. The new Tory government in London did not know enough about the Northern situation to make any big decisions yet. Maudling’s policy of leaving more decisions to “the men on the spot” simply meant that they did not yet know what to make of the conflicting intelligence estimates. This of course gave the military a chance to try out counter-insurgency tactics of their own, and the Unionists were only too glad to back them. One major area of uncertainty was what would happen if internment without trial were to be introduced. Most of the talk had been about the Protestant backlash. But neither the military nor the politicians could be sure of the extent of the *Catholic* backlash if they had to enforce internment. This big operation led many of them to believe that it could be contained.

But the limited finds of hidden weapons in the Lower Falls area

were a poor exchange for two enormous miscalculations. All the Unionist leaders could think of was that an old Republican area had been overrun and given plenty of stick. They were too triumphant to pay attention to the fact that the Lower Falls was an NLF stronghold, not a Provisional one. To try to gauge the reaction to internment from the scale of resistance there was bound to result in a serious under-estimate. The other miscalculation became apparent inside a matter of hours. Far from intimidating the Irish people, the behaviour of the British that weekend alienated them in tens of thousands. Coming on top of the successful IRA-led defence of Ballymacarret and other districts, what the battle of the Lower Falls did was to provide endless water for the Republican guerrilla fish to swim in.

What was more, people drew inevitable comparisons between the courage of the D Company volunteers in engaging a British force literally hundreds of times their own strength and the way the Dublin government's troops had stood uselessly by across the border. Many Northerners did not want to admit to themselves that the South had no intention of protecting them, but now the facts had to be faced. The option was to have either no defence or IRA defence.

A great wave of support swung to the Provisional Army Council. Recruits came forward to offer their services at an ever-increasing rate. We were already well established in Belfast, Armagh and Down, and fairly strong in Fermanagh and parts of Tyrone. But up to the beginning of July there had been spots where we had been making slow progress, particularly in Derry city and county where personal loyalties had been strained at the time of the split. Now things changed rapidly. Several new units were established, including two in Derry, and the former blank spots were no longer a problem.

What response this would provoke from the British I did not yet know, but I was to learn very quickly.

The Orange Order had rejected all appeals to cancel the big Twelfth of July processions. The twelfth was, in fact, a Sunday that year and they were to be held on the thirteenth. On the day before in Belfast I called to the house of Leo Martin, the prominent Republican who had been No. 1 on the UVF assassination list at the time of the Malvern Street shootings. Glancing in at the front window, I saw that the room was crowded with priests. Leo opened the door with a big grin.

"The right man in the right spot," he said. "Come on in."

Wondering what all this was about, I followed him into the room. Those present included Father Patrick Murphy, the parish priest of St. Peter's, and Father Toner, secretary to the Bishop of Down and Connor.

"Now," Leo said to them, "you can ask Séan himself the questions you've been asking me."

Immediately Father Murphy told me he had information that the Provisional IRA intended to attack the Orange processions. He delivered this in a solemn and dogmatic manner, and I had to smile.

"It's no laughing matter," one of them said.

I told them that the idea was preposterous. "The Republican movement has no intention whatsoever of interfering with the marches tomorrow," I assured them.

The priest pressed me very hard. Was I absolutely sure?

"Father," I said, "whoever informed you has misinformed you."

Impossible, he said. His information came from impeccable sources. Wanting to know more, I did some pressing myself. Eventually I discovered that it had reached him indirectly from British intelligence.

I told Father Murphy rather sarcastically that either the British had been misled themselves or they were deliberately misleading him. Privately, I had not much doubt. Unfortunately, at that time many people in the North were still a lot more naïve about counter-insurgency tactics than they are today. It could be very hard to convince respected local figures that they were being used, and that British intelligence officers had more fish to fry than just relaying facts.

As things turned out, however, these rumours appeared to be of benefit to one person at least, Chichester-Clark himself. As a member of the Orange Order, if he marched with his lodge that year the international media would have a field day with pictures of the Stormont premier openly supporting the Protestant supremacists. The British could not afford that. On the other hand, he would offend the Orangemen if he avoided the march without a plausible excuse. The British solved Chichester-Clark's problem by putting him into a helicopter and flying him up and down above the parades on the pretext that he was inspecting the security measures.

In the event, the marches passed off without incident. There never had been any IRA plan to attack them.

The Brits were keeping their wits about them in the cities.

Something had to be done, but our chances of catching them out would probably be better in the rural areas. An unsuccessful attempt was made to shoot down one of their helicopters. But these were still early days, before the IRA and the enemy helicopters had much to do with each other. Later on, as the rural units developed more experience, they successfully brought down some of these machines.

Another retaliation operation outside Derry resulted in a jeep being blown up and the two men in it injured. It turned out to belong to the Ulster Defence Regiment. Although that force was under British command and, as I have said, collaborated in the oppression of the Nationalist districts, its members had not been included as targets for retaliation in the summer of 1970. Nevertheless, as there was nothing about their military jeep to distinguish it, the IRA unit had been under the impression that it was a British army vehicle. They reported in, looking very worried and believing they would be court-martialled for an unauthorised attack on UDR personnel. But if that outfit liked to strut around in British uniform on its part-time duties, it was unrealistic to expect the other side not to make mistakes. Later they paid more attention to their unit markings.

Sabotage operations had begun in the spring. These were strictly selective bombings by a small number of units and originally confined to Belfast. As the organisation got off the ground during the summer, however, further areas, and eventually all the North, were involved. The older British hands obviously recognised the pattern and logic of target selection in such a campaign, for of course many of them had been taught such methods themselves. British and other saboteurs learned their trade during the Second World War at the so-called "Station Seventeen" on a country estate near Hertford, where the second-in-command stated, "a student was taught how with the minimum but correct amount of explosive to incapacitate a radio pylon, a telephone exchange, a transformer . . . the list was endless."

The IRA sabotage teams operating in the North of Ireland in 1970 were similarly striking at communications and power supplies in enemy-occupied territory. Later, as British saboteurs on the Continent had done, they broadened their operations to attempt retaliatory actions against the occupying troops. In one night in Down and Armagh, eight explosions took place, all against good targets, including a fifty thousand pound telephone exchange which was destroyed.

In line with this policy, Michael O’Kane, the first IRA casualty of the campaign, was attempting to destroy an electricity installation in New Forge Lane in Belfast when he was killed by the premature explosion. Neither the local nor the national leadership denied responsibility, and my own oration at his funeral should have prevented speculation that Michael was engaged in anything but an IRA operation. But the tragedy was exploited by the NLF in Dublin. They spread the smear that the incident in which Michael died had been instigated by certain Fianna Fáil politicians in connection with the arms trial of the former Ministers about to open in Dublin.

The NLF had good reason to resent us. Our growth destroyed their claim to represent the greater part of Republican support. That claim had been based on paper majorities achieved by rigged conventions and bureaucratic manoeuvring, and it could only last for a brief period.

Indeed, we no longer had any need to regard ourselves as a provisional structure in any sense. Under the terms agreed in December we were bound to hold a general convention, if possible within six months, to regularise the framework, representation and leadership of the reorganised movement. The Orange attacks in June and the hectic expansion after the fighting in July did not give us a chance to do this. However, by September things had quietened down sufficiently for this convention to assemble.

It was the largest convention I had ever seen. It was full of vigour and enthusiasm, and the big contingent from Belfast set the pace with typical Northern practicality and directness. Here we restored the solid basis of the movement, rendered an account of ourselves to the unit delegates, and waited for whatever decisions their votes would bring. I was re-elected to the leadership and was reappointed with the same duties and responsibilities.

The fast growth that had been going on at the same time in the political wing was reflected in October by the massive turnout for the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis at Liberty Hall in Dublin, at which Ruairí Brádaigh was re-elected President. This was followed in November by a vast public attendance at the annual Edentubber commemoration, and by another a few weeks later at the unveiling of a memorial to Feargal O’Hanlon outside his birthplace in Monaghan town.

These occasions clearly demonstrated to our members, our outside supporters and the Irish people as a whole the strength which the Provisional Republican movement had reached in the few short

months since its humble beginnings. There was no doubt now which was the predominant Republican force. We had left the "officials" of the NLF far behind in membership and in organisation. We had established a firm structure with the power coming from the bottom to the top, as it must in a true revolutionary movement. We had regularised the leadership position. We had realistic policies.

The chief objective of those policies was the real Republic, the Republic of one Ireland, without the British, without partition and without neo-colonial compromise. The year 1970 had set us on the road to that Republic. But waiting along that road was war. In the year that followed, it could no longer be avoided if the claws of imperialism were to be made to let go their hold on the Irish nation.

Chapter II

Stormont Totters

In the middle of January 1971 an extraordinary situation arose. The British, aware of the close involvement of the Republicans in the largest Nationalist communities in Belfast, made surprising overtures. Having totally failed as “peacekeepers” themselves, they secretly proposed that the IRA should do the peacekeeping for them.

This came about in the following manner. Chichester-Clark had come in pledged to carry out O'Neill's minor reforms, but inside a few months he, too, was at the end of his tether. Every time a serious incident occurred he demanded more and more troops from the British, in the desperate belief that this would make him appear to be the “strong man” the Loyalist right wing wanted. The real impact of the Republican campaign had not even begun to be felt early in 1971, and the British wanted to keep what they could in reserve to meet later eventualities.

In an effort to get the best effect with the manpower they already had in the North, they operated a saturation policy in the areas where they expected least co-operation with Stormont. Politicians were talking in London about people being “reassured” by concentrations of British troops in the cities and towns. The fact was that, under this policy of selective saturation, the British soldiers caused friction, resentment and problems that had not been there before. And, no matter what anyone in England liked to believe, people in these areas hated the sight of them.

The British troops themselves, doing four-month tours in the North, got no ordinary leave. This was an extremely stupid policy, with men left all that time in the midst of a big civilian community within easy reach of the city itself. They got frustrated and jealous of

other people enjoying themselves, and groups of residents coming back from a party or an evening out were often picked on with special resentment.

The upshot of the “reassuring” military presence was that the troops got more and more bloody-minded with the people, who wanted nothing to do with them. The people, for their own part, got heartily sick and tired of being stopped, searched, questioned and insulted by these working-class renegades who knew that only their loaded and cocked weapons kept them from being badly beaten.

Every now and again a riot blew up. When that happened, Chichester-Clark rushed to the phone or the airport to demand yet more troops. More troops, more friction, and sooner or later more riots.

On our side we didn’t want the sensitive communities to blow up. No army, whether guerrilla or conventional, can hope for good results without trained troops. Time was needed to complete the training of the new volunteers who had been streaming into the IRA in the later part of 1970.

The big Nationalist estate at Ballymurphy, where British troops were stationed permanently, erupted into serious rioting halfway through January. The Belfast leadership of the IRA, as anxious as the rest of us to keep the area quiet, did their utmost to cool the situation. They had almost succeeded when hundreds of British army personnel descended on the estate and began an intensive house-to-house search.

That set things off worse than ever. This time nobody was going to wait around tamely while the British cordoned and curfewed the place in another mass intimidation operation. They were warned from several quarters that they would be wise to pull their troops out of Ballymurphy before they escalated the situation to a point of no return. The British took this to heart. On the third night of the rioting they made contact with the IRA.

With the consent of the national leadership, representatives of the Belfast brigade staff met British officers for confidential talks. Our bargaining position was strong. The British wanted what the Belfast officers wanted themselves, to damp things down in Ballymurphy. The British were willing to agree that there would be no activity in certain areas of Belfast either by their own forces or the RUC.

It was no part of the IRA’s business to make matters easier for the occupation forces. In any case, it was doubtful that the British could

be trusted for long. While they kept up their repression in *any* area they had to be hit, because if they weren't, the IRA would start to lose the tremendous support it had built up in the communities. The thing was to hit them without making the pot boil over completely, pitching the movement into the next phase of the campaign prematurely.

Nevertheless, the proposal they were putting up had three points in its favour. It would buy a little relief from harassment for some of the Belfast people, if the Brits kept their promise. It would provide an opportunity to demonstrate Republican discipline in self-policed communities. And it was a limited local agreement which did not affect the movement's overall demand for an eventual British withdrawal from Ireland altogether.

Following the staff officers' meeting with the British, it took another couple of days for the IRA unit in Ballymurphy to bring the trouble under control. The area was well policed by the Republicans and vigilantes. The crime rate in the estate had been in no way remarkable for a huge area with high unemployment resulting from sectarian discrimination. Over the previous few months, a large number of house-breaking cases had been investigated. Watching British soldiers smashing their way into houses was not the best way for youngsters in a tough urban neighbourhood to learn respect for other people's property.

Under IRA policing, in seventeen cases the victims of thieves were reimbursed and those responsible received suitable punishment. Several cases of vandalism and hooliganism received attention, and more than twenty instances of petty crime by young children were brought to the notice of their parents. Shop-breaking and theft of cars and motor-cycles also had to be dealt with. In some parts of west Belfast the Republican vigilantes also introduced policing for a number of schools.

Despite the IRA's success at Ballymurphy, the British army's promise to ease up on their activity in certain Belfast districts was quickly broken. In February a new British GOC, Lieutenant-General Crum, arrived in the North in place of Freeland. On the same day Farrar-Hockley, the major-general commanding land forces, said at a press conference that the army's policy of intensive searches was to continue. He named certain Republicans, including some of those who had taken part in the talks with British officers on what had been agreed as a confidential basis. So much for good faith. A large

force cordoned and searched the Ardoyne and Clonard areas, and the fat finally went into the fire.

Once again roadblocks were put up around the target areas. The British troops behaved in their usual arrogant fashion, incidents flared up between them and local people, and the fiercest rioting seen in Belfast for some time broke out. Forty people were arrested during that night.

Time after time the Republican movement had warned in public statements that force would be met by force. Up to then, as I have shown, IRA military policy, except for a period after the Lower Falls cruelty, had been limited to defence plus selective sabotage operations against installations. It was time to move into a far more determined phase of retaliation, one of anti-personnel operations.

In the early hours of February 6 a British patrol was successfully ambushed in the New Lodge Road in Belfast. Gunner Robert Curtis was killed and four other enemy soldiers wounded, one of whom later died. At long last the step had been taken. This was the first time for fifty years that a British soldier had been killed by an IRA unit.

On the same night there was an outbreak of sectarian trouble in the Old Park area. Snipers of the UVF were operating from Louisa Street, firing into a nearby Nationalist street. Residents went to British troops out on the Old Park Road and asked them to take some action about the sniping, but their requests were refused. RUC men were also present but did nothing either.

Republicans came to make an estimate of the situation. Jim Saunders, a company officer of the Third Battalion, was killed by a UVF sniper. When the British did become involved, one of them opened fire on an unarmed man and killed him too. This was Barney Watt, who was a member of Sinn Féin but was not in the IRA.

Just before Jim Saunders' funeral moved off from his home in Ardilea Street, a volley was fired over his coffin and a guard of honour formed around the hearse. A party of British troops foolishly entered the street and tried to interfere. Before they knew where they were, they had been beaten, kicked and pushed out of Ardilea Street and ten yards down the Old Park Road by hundreds of furious people. At the top of the road there were jeers from a crowd of Protestant extremists and further incidents. During the funeral of Barney Watt the hearse was actually attacked, and one of the Loyalists snatched the Tricolour off the coffin and disappeared with it. Another was obtained and the coffin was redraped for burial.

It was only to be expected that politicians and establishment figures North and South would follow the British in blaming Republicans for causing the violence. On February 8 Brigadier Tickell, the official British army spokesman in the North, set the new military propaganda line. This said flatly that the Provisional IRA were the aggressors and always attacked first. The very next day there was a wee echo from Dublin. Lynch had condemned the use of force. It was the same with some, though not all, of the bishops.

The press, British and Irish, varied from extremely critical to hysterical in attitudes to the Republican movement. They were spreading the idea that Republicans were to blame for the situation in the North.

We were not. The blame lay squarely on England, and with the Irish politicians and church leaders who propped up the status quo and the British connection. As for condemning force, England could not hold any part of Ireland except by military force. When that force was exercised against the population, the troops who exercised it became legitimate targets for Republican resistance fighters.

As an individual, I was sorry for anyone's death, whether Irishman or Englishman. No doubt as individuals there were those on the British side who felt that too. But this did not prevent their soldiers from volunteering to harass and kill the people of another country which they knew next to nothing about. There was no conscription in the British army in 1971. Every man in it was a professional taking his military chances for money and promotion. If a soldier had any doubts, he could buy out or not re-enlist. But if he was in the North, it was nobody's fault but his own. An unjust system was crashing down around him. He had no idea why, but he was ready to shoot those who did know, smash up homes and arrest innocent men and women. In doing so, he called a guerrilla army into existence against him. And the politicians would not give a damn whether he lived or died, as long as his weapons helped to keep them in power.

As action between British and Republican units became more frequent, relations between ourselves and the NLF deteriorated rapidly. By the second week of March friction was mounting. There had already been several incidents. When a boy of Fianna Eireann, the Republican youth movement, was beaten up by NLF members, the Provisional leadership in Belfast assigned two men to investigate. The two were kidnapped and badly knocked about by the NLF, and their fingers were broken by a gun-butt. Following this, a supporter

of the Provisional movement was shot. The Belfast leadership decided they could not ignore these provocations. The kidnapped men had been tortured in two public houses. The first was cleared of people and burnt down in retaliation. On the way to the second, Provisionals came under fire from the NLF in the Leeson Street area and returned it. After quite a fierce gun-battle, which the British observed with glee, talks were arranged and both sides agreed to get their men off the streets.

That night Charlie Hughes, OC of D Company, the Second Battalion unit which had helped the NLF in the battle of the Lower Falls, was in a house in Cyprus Street with Proinsias MacAirt. Proinsias had to go over to the other side of the city, and Charlie stepped outside to see if the road was clear.

He had taken only a few paces when there was a terrible burst of fire. Charlie fell back.

I quickly heard of this and rang Belfast. I wanted a first-hand report. The situation was too dangerous for half-checked stuff. Eventually MacAirt himself came on.

"Charlie died in my arms, Seán," he said.

All of us were extremely angry over this, and it was touch and go whether full-scale war would break out between the two organisations. But common sense prevailed in the Belfast leadership. The national interest must come first, and that kind of action would do nothing to serve it. Besides, the recollection of the Brits laughing their heads off that night around Leeson Street acted as a brake on several officers. At the request of neutral mediators, they agreed to meet NLF representatives in Belfast. The meeting resulted in arrangements for a truce to be enforced by both sides on their members.

Within a few hours of this agreement, however, a further Republican was shot by the NLF and seriously wounded. This time it was Joe Cahill's brother Tom. He was partially paralysed in the attack, carried out while he was unarmed and working on a milk round. Had it not been for Joe's own coolness in this situation, Belfast might indeed have seen a war within a war.

Almost immediately the NLF leadership sent word that they were very sorry for the shooting. The unit involved had not received notification that the truce was on. That told me a good deal about the state of their communications. The unit in question was only two miles from their Belfast headquarters.

The NLF propagandists in their would-be “think tank” in Dublin could chalk up a great success for the smear campaign that had led to this fatal result. That wasn’t all. The RUC Special Branch arrested Tom Cahill, claiming he had been in possession of ammunition, and he was sentenced to two years’ imprisonment. Two years for being shot!

In that spring of 1971, only a few months after his appointment as British GOC in the North in place of Freeland, General Crum died of a heart attack. He was replaced in turn by General Harry Tuzo. Tuzo was an artillery officer used to dealing with big hardware and heavy forces. The guerrilla campaign now developing should most logically be countered by fast, light British forces. We realised that General Tuzo was not likely to put the IRA out of business. In fact the British did not change their strategy to meet the IRA initiative launched in February with anti-personnel attacks against their troops. They continued to bear down on the civilian population in the Nationalist areas with the main weight of their forces.

On the political side Chichester-Clark resigned as premier on March 20. He had requested ridiculous numbers of troops under pressure from his own right wing. The British did not have them. When he threatened to resign, the British didn’t do anything to prevent him. It was time to produce the next “strong man” who, it was hoped on the Unionist side, would keep Stormont from collapsing. On March 23 Brian Faulkner, who had held various posts in previous Northern governments, beat William Craig in a Unionist parliamentary party vote by a margin of twenty-six to four and went on to become premier.

As soon as Faulkner took office, we knew that he would try to impress the British with a show of toughness. He was an advocate of internment without trial. We did not think he was in a position to try it immediately, but I was taking no chances. I advised staff people in the North to start making arrangements for spending their nights somewhere other than their homes.

In preparation for internment RUC and English Special Branch detectives in Belfast began convictions against Republicans on very peculiar evidence. An example was the tactics used to remove Billy McKee and Proinsias MacAirt from the scene. They were travelling in a car with another man in the Ardoyne when it was stopped and searched by a British patrol. The search was an extremely thorough one, both of the car and the men. During it, the British troops took

out the back seat. They found absolutely nothing. Nevertheless, the three men were taken into custody. The car was searched again by a special team of detectives from Scotland Yard, who then claimed to have found an automatic pistol under the back seat which the soldiers had already removed and replaced.

McKee and MacAirt were sentenced to five years' imprisonment for possession of a firearm. As they were being removed from the court, Billy McKee shouted, "We shall fight on."

And fight on he did. He led the hunger strike which won political status for Republican and Loyalist prisoners alike, and he went on hunger strike on two later occasions when attempts were made to whittle down that status. In this effort for his comrades, and indeed for men whose views were greatly opposed to his own, Billy McKee was one of the outstanding jail fighters of the 'seventies.

Leo Martin, another close friend of mine, was arrested as he left the cemetery after the funeral of Tony Henderson, a volunteer from Andersonstown accidentally shot dead at a training camp. It was claimed he had taken part in a BBC television interview. The case fell flat when the reporter, Bernard Falk, refused to identify Leo as the man he had interviewed. This was an illustration of the freedom of the media in the Northern police state.

By April the new units springing up all over the place created tremendous problems for the Republican supply organisation, but the Supply Department had one overall brief, to work miracles, and gradually they began to. There was enough equipment to step up the campaign for early summer. In April there were over forty IRA operations, in May just under fifty and in June well over that. By the end of June, the British had lost eight dead and almost a hundred and fifty injured. Even at that early stage, the troops' wives and families were showing their worry. They wanted their men back in England or at their quiet stations in Germany. Our paper *An Phoblacht* asked how many more soldiers would have to die before British forces were finally withdrawn from Ireland. Two years later the answer was still not known, although by then hundreds of them had been killed and thousands injured.

There were Republican casualties too, and many members of the movement continued to be arrested on various charges. An IRA Lieutenant, Willie Reid, was killed in action in Belfast during May.

By early summer we got our first real taste of "black" psychological warfare from the British. A good deal was known about such

methods in theory, of course, in much the same way as the British army knows about nuclear warfare in theory. And the EOKA boys in prison had opened my eyes to some of the things that were done in Cyprus in this particular field.

The British army propaganda section unleashed a campaign to convince the public that IRA bombing was directed against civilians. This was completely untrue, but it was a counter-initiative which forced the Republican movement on to the defensive on the psychological front. These charges had to be answered. On several occasions the movement had accepted responsibility for incidents which had led to the injury, or sometimes the unfortunate death, of civilians. But the movement had stated adamantly that warnings had always been given, and in every case it was subsequently proved that they *had* been given. If those warnings had been acted on promptly and effectively there would have been ample time to clear civilians from the area. It did not then occur to the Northern volunteers that anyone would ever deliberately withhold such warnings and let such casualties occur *even after warnings had been accepted and acknowledged*.

It can be imagined how hard it was for us to battle against the well organised strategy of the British psychological warfare sections, the RUC press officers, the Stormont and Unionist party propaganda teams, and the British information services, before even taking into account the hostility of the British and pro-Unionist media. Against this enormous array we had the limited resources of the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau and the little paper *An Phoblacht*, plus the *Republican News* which had been Jimmy Steele's last project for his native North.

Wild media speculation was another situation that had to be coped with around that time. Rumours were put about that the Provisional IRA was associated in some way with Aontacht Eireann (Irish Unity), the new political party which had been started in the South. Its leader was Kevin Boland, the Minister who had resigned from Lynch's government before the arms trial. Also associated with it was Captain Kelly, the Dublin intelligence officer whose military career had been cut short over the same affair, even though he was acquitted.

It was important that we made our attitude to this new party quite clear. When I was asked to comment, I pointed out that as Republicans we had nothing in common with Mr Boland and his

friends. They approved of the Anglo-Irish free trade agreement, membership in the EEC, and the sell-out of Irish resources to foreign capitalist interests. Furthermore, although they professed to be disillusioned with the Southern political set-up, they were still prepared to take part in it and thus help maintain the status quo. Both the military and political wings of the movement publicly repudiated the suggestion of any association.

Much anti-Provisional speculation which appeared in the Dublin papers was in fact promoted by the NLF and fed to certain journalists as "inside information". As it was not taking an active revolutionary role, the NLF, despite its Marxist orientations, began to develop a much better image in the Southern press. In contrast, our own policy was never to issue any statement or material criticising these former comrades. Any short-term gain achieved by such tactics, as we knew very well, would be offset by the opportunity we would be giving the enemies of Republicanism.

Our Bodinstown commemoration in June was attended by at least fourteen thousand people, compared with five thousand the previous year. Veterans said it was the largest Republican gathering there since the mid-'thirties. The principal speaker was Joe Cahill. My own part was a more humble yet very privileged one. I laid the wreath on the grave of Wolfe Tone, father of Irish Republicans, on behalf of the Republican movement itself. After that huge turnout, nobody could mistake how the movement was growing, North and South.

It was at the end of May or the beginning of June that we received the first definite intelligence that the SAS were operating in the North of Ireland. The British have consistently denied it. The facts were that the SAS was not in the North *as a unit*. It was there in small groups attached to other formations.

The original Special Air Service Regiment was formed during the Second World War. Afterwards it was reorganised by combining a British territorial unit and local mercenaries known as "ferrets" for use against the Malayan Races Liberation Army in the early 1950s. SAS elements later operated in Kenya, where Kitson was then a captain, in Cyprus, Borneo, Aden and South Arabia. In Cyprus, the SAS operated plain-clothes squads called "Q gangs" against EOKA in the mountains and the cities. In Aden they implemented a secret policy of shooting members of the FLN and FLOSY in order to turn the two branches of the liberation movement against each other. In

its present form, it is called the 22nd SAS Regiment with its headquarters (bombed in 1973) in Chelsea and a depot in Hereford. It is organised in squadrons divided into troops of twenty men.

The reports we received in May 1971 warned that they would try to bring about another clash between the Provisional movement and the NLF. This attempt was to be carried out by plain-clothes soldiers using captured weapons.

We decided to release the information publicly. This might force the British to drop the idea. It didn't. They were in a position to pick their own time and place and there was no real way of stopping them. Very soon afterwards a party of NLF people were fired on by men with weapons which were not official British army issue. If we had not made our information known in advance, this might have led to a serious armed confrontation between the two organisations.

At the beginning of June, in a BBC television interview, General Tuzo gave what purported to be an outline of British military policy in the North. It was all very bland and easy-going. He said he believed his troops could "achieve a gradual ascendancy" over the IRA. But he did not think that military means could bring about a permanent solution.

Now, this kind of stuff, of course, was aimed directly at the British home public and at overseas opinion. The game was to encourage the belief that the British had fixed on a patient military policy (the "holding the ring" line) while the politicians in the meantime worked out a settlement. Not one newspaper or commentator asked, "Have you ever heard of a general who reveals his plans in advance to his military opponents?" Tuzo's explanation was swallowed wholesale.

The truth, quite different, was revealed at almost the same time. Faulkner and the Conservative British Home Secretary, Maudling, met in London, officially to discuss the prospects for the Northern economy, as well as other matters. Afterwards Faulkner let it be known that soldiers could now fire "with effect" and without warning on seeing anyone with a weapon "or acting suspiciously." Pressed for clarification, he explained that "acting suspiciously" applied to situations in which weapons *might* be used. Maudling hid implications for the civil population with a dramatic statement that the British government was now "at war with the IRA."

When this policy was launched we wanted to be certain that the

two great urban areas, Belfast and Derry, would be thoroughly organised for resistance. Until then Derry had remained a sore disappointment to us. In May GHQ had sent up a full-time organiser and an assistant, both Belfast men. They did splendid work. Within a matter of weeks they had many of the difficulties there sorted out and at last managed to get the Republican movement in Derry organised on a sound basis. We could now be sure that resistance there would be every bit as intense as in Belfast.

The Nominal "Opposition" in Stormont consisted principally of the six-man Social Democratic and Labour Party led by Gerry Fitt. On June 22 Faulkner announced proposals for creating three new government committees which would advise on social and economic issues, industrial development and other matters.

Of course, the SDLP accepted the proposals. This "Faulkner reform package" was welcomed by the media and in establishment quarters in Westminster and Dublin as giving the Catholic opposition a meaningful part in government of the North for the first time in fifty years.

The Republican leadership issued a statement condemning the SDLP's acceptance of Faulkner's proposals, on the grounds that if the SDLP withdrew completely from that puppet parliament it would hasten the end of Stormont.

By the end of June, both the stick and the carrot were now plainly in view. On the one hand, we had the military pressure being threatened by Maudling in his talk of being at war with the IRA. And on the other, there were political half-measures meant to woo the SDLP into becoming more deeply entangled in Stormont – and with a vested interest in preserving it. But where would the SDLP be left when the British launched the tough military policy on the Catholic areas they represented?

The answer came in early July. This time it was Derry that erupted. It began when resistance, both organised and sporadic, broke out night after night as the young men and women demonstrated their hostility towards the troops. The result was all-out rioting that lasted for a week. The British tried at first to break this resistance with CS gas, truncheons and rifle butts. Then they resorted to the bullet.

Two unemployed young Derrymen, Séamus Cusack and Desmond Beattie, were shot dead. Neither belonged to the Republican movement, and indeed both of them were known for their moderate

views. The British at first claimed that Cusack and Beattie had been using firearms, then changed their story and said that Beattie had been holding a bomb.

But scientific tests on Beattie's body and clothing later detected no signs of contact with explosives, petrol or a gun. And people who were there said that, far from having a rifle, Cusack was going to remove the child of another local moderate, Patrick Duffy, from the danger zone.

Retribution was sharp and swift. In Derry alone, seventy troops were injured, several with gunshot wounds. In Newry, fire was opened on a military patrol and soldiers were wounded. The Armagh unit blew up a jeep and injured several more. In Belfast, retaliation was more serious, and Republican active service units quickly shot two soldiers dead.

An intensive sabotage campaign was carried out during July in parallel with the anti-personnel retaliations. There were also several daring attacks on RUC stations in Belfast, in Springfield Road, Hastings Street, and elsewhere.

British newspapers were being printed on Irish soil, selling pro-British propaganda. On July 17 an active service unit took over the *Daily Mirror* plant near Belfast in daylight and completely destroyed it. It was a costly operation for the British government. The compensation bill was in the region of ten million pounds.

But the political repercussions were to be of the utmost significance. While Orangemen held their Twelfth of July parades at eighteen places throughout the North, John Hume of the SDLP held a press conference in Derry. He announced that unless an impartial inquiry into the killing of Cusack and Beattie were set up within four days, he and the other SDLP members would leave Stormont.

I went to see Paddy Kennedy, the Republican Labour MP who sat at Stormont. "Well, Paddy," I said, "I don't think I have to tell *you* what is the right thing to do now."

"I've already done it," he replied.

He pre-empted the SDLP compromise by calling his own press conference and announcing that not only was he leaving Stormont, but the Republican Labour local government representatives were withdrawing from the Belfast Corporation. On the following day, Wednesday, the Nationalist Party pulled out too. By Thursday, the deadline Hume had fixed, the SDLP had no alternative but to withdraw from Stormont themselves. At last the illusion of demo-

crazy in Stormont had been shattered. The Republican policy of non-recognition and non-participation in such fraudulent institutions had been vindicated.

Faulkner was now in the same spot that O'Neill and Chichester-Clark had been in before him. The Unionist hard-liners were demanding still stronger measures to save Stormont. Faulkner knew that the British did not have the troops to hold down the North completely. His only resort was to order internment, which he had always favoured.

On the first of August Farrar-Hockley was switched to Germany and replaced as commander of land forces in the North by Major-General Robert Ford, the man who was to be in control in Derry during the Bloody Sunday massacre. We knew that some high-ranking British army people were opposed to internment. They had more foresight than Faulkner had, and they knew what internment would lead to. It began to look as though there had been a serious division of opinion among the British top brass. Why had Farrar-Hockley been moved out of the North at the very time he would have been most useful to the British? He had run the hard policy in the Clonard, the Ardoyne and elsewhere and knew the North well by then. It was certainly not the moment to change horses and put everything in the hands of a new land forces commander who didn't know the lie of the land. The division of opinion could only be between those senior officers who believed that ruthlessness could contain the situation, and those who knew it would escalate it into a full-scale war that could not be contained. Which policy General Ford favoured can be judged from later events.

There had been a vast intensification of British army intelligence work by this time, which was noted in turn by Republican counter-intelligence. One symptom was increased activity by British army cameramen at funerals, demonstrations and meetings. They were taking hundreds and hundreds of photographs, in addition to the hidden cameras used for filming riots. But the photographs they were taking now were of individuals. Collated with other intelligence and the analysis of various bits of open information, it pointed to a big move being planned.

At dawn on July 23 hundreds of homes were raided all over the North and forty-eight people were detained for questioning. The British found no documentation or anything of particular value to them in these mass raids. Nor did they net any big Republican fish.

Selective instructions had been issued to key members of the movement beforehand not to sleep at home. After the raids security checks were made by the IRA to enforce these instructions rigorously and to confirm that the people in question had arranged safe billets.

These raids continued through the beginning of August. The intelligence coming in pointed to an imminent large-scale operation by the British.

Faulkner went to London on Thursday, August 5. There was no official statement, but it was reported that he had obtained another thousand soldiers. Too low. Either the media were being fooled, or they were playing along. All ports and airfields were carefully watched by our intelligence. When the extra troops were slipped in, as suspected, they did not arrive unseen. All weekend, streams of military aircraft were flying into Aldergrove, landing men and equipment.

This was it, all right. Internment was on.

Chapter 12

Time of Torture

The desperate resort to internment was preceded by a weekend of extreme violence set in motion by the act of a British paratrooper in Belfast. On Saturday morning, August 7, he opened fire on a van in the Springfield Road and shot the driver dead. The man was Harry Thornton, aged twenty-eight, a building trade worker. The vehicle had to slow down to pass the military barricade outside Springfield Road RUC barracks, which was used as battalion headquarters for 2 Parachute Regiment. The army "explanation" was that two shots had been fired from the van as it passed and the soldier had fired two in return. But too many people saw what had really happened.

Harry Thornton was a worker from near Crossmaglen, and the Unionist establishment did not go out of its way to provide employment in that strongly Nationalist area. So he came to Belfast to find a job. But in the city it was not easy for a man with a wife and six children to get a house, even without the discrimination policy. To keep his family he had to be away from them during the week, a migrant worker in his own province.

That old grey van went down the Springfield Road every morning. Harry Thornton's passenger was a man named Arthur Murphy. Their boss, Louis McGuinness, was accompanying them in a car behind with another worker, Michael McGlade.

McGlade said that when they stopped at the traffic lights after passing the barracks the van was in the inside lane. "I said to Louis McGuinness, 'There's a shot fired.' Says he, 'There's not?' I said, 'There's a bullet hole in the van.' "

"So he jumped out. As soon as he got out, your man that shot him

was standing at the window.” The soldier told them to “get f---ing back.” Harry Thornton was dead over the wheel.

Another eye-witness was a man who lived beside the barracks. He said he heard a lot of shouting coming from inside, with somebody saying, “That’s it, that’s it, the grey one.” An RUC man rushed out past him and ran down the street in a crouching manner with drawn revolver toward the traffic lights.

“A soldier came rushing down on the far side of the street. He was in a distraught condition and roaring. When he got some distance down there he opened fire on the back of the van.

“A crowd formed immediately. After the body was removed, a jeep drew up with three soldiers in it, and the driver of the jeep shouted, ‘Hurroo, one up and one to go.’ ”

People saw a sergeant and constable of the RUC throw the other man from the same van, Arthur Murphy, against the wall and search him. Michael McGlade said, “He had nothing on him, only his wages.” The van was completely clean too. The paratrooper had killed a totally innocent worker in front of his employer and workmates.

That was bad enough. But the security forces now went on to make matters even worse. There were no marks on Arthur Murphy when they dragged him into their barracks for questioning. As feeling rose among the people in the area, various MPs and public representatives were sent for to intervene. Paddy Kennedy flatly described the killing as “bloody murder.” Soon a doctor was needed for Arthur Murphy. A local practitioner, Dr Joe Hendron, went into the barracks.

“When I saw him he had two black eyes. He told me he was pulled by his clothes into the barracks. There he was beaten up severely. Afterwards he was taken to a special room where he was told to lie down on the floor, and was severely kicked. His forehead was badly swollen and his nose was bleeding profusely. The army doctor had already inserted a few stitches in his head.” Dr Hendron said that Arthur Murphy’s injuries were consistent with his account of what had been done to him.

After a great deal of pressure and argument, Arthur Murphy was reluctantly released six hours later. When he came out, crowds and television crews were waiting outside the barracks. His face was a battered mass of bruises, with plaster on it in two places where he had been cut. On seeing his condition, the feelings of the people

mounted to fury. And when it became known that Arthur Murphy had laid an official complaint about his treatment, the city began to go mad.

The army tried to back down, and senior officers were now involved. A new "explanation" said that what the paratrooper had actually heard was the old van backfiring, and that he had mistaken the noise for shooting. It was not explained why, in that case, Arthur Murphy had been beaten up for six hours.

Joe Cahill and I went down to the Springfield Road at about half-past ten that morning, before setting out to Antrim and south Derry. We got on a bus and went upstairs. Within minutes, two young people jumped on and went through the bus distributing leaflets giving the real facts of the shooting. Sinn Féin in Belfast had already gathered and checked the testimony of those in the vicinity, got the true story out in pamphlet form, and inside three hours of the incident their members were using the buses to circulate it in the Nationalist areas. I complimented Sinn Féin on this before the weekend was out.

When Joe and I reached the scene of the shooting, flowers had been placed around a crucifix on the spot where Harry Thornton had died. Many women were gathered about. Groups of British troops were assembled on each corner of the junction of the Falls and the Springfield Road. Some had SLRs, and others were in full riot gear with shields and truncheons. Studying them, I remarked to Joe, "These boys are itching to go."

By the time we got back to Belfast that night, grateful for the fog that had forced the British to move their roadblocks, serious rioting was in progress. Furious with the attempts of the media to justify the murder of Harry Thornton, people had overturned and set fire to a newspaper van in the Springfield Road. The shocking sight of Arthur Murphy emerging in his dazed and battered condition did the rest. Crowds stoned the barracks, first with rocks, then with paving stones ripped up from the roadway, and later on with small heavy concrete plugs which arrived in sackfuls from somewhere. Candles were lit around the little shrine. But soon there were bigger flames as troops fired rubber bullets and the people retaliated with petrol bombs, some of which set barricades alight.

During the night the rioting spread throughout the city but was particularly heavy in the Ardoyne, where a woman was fatally shot through the head and three other civilians and eight soldiers were

injured. On the Springfield Road things were quiet during the morning, but clashes between the people and the paratroopers broke out again that afternoon on Sunday, August 8.

We were keeping a close watch on British troop movements into the North. British television was describing elements of 42 Medium Regiment of the Royal Artillery being moved out from Devizes in Wiltshire as "part of the strengthening of security forces before the Apprentice Boys' parade" held annually in Derry.

Around two o'clock on Sunday afternoon Joe and I left for Lurgan, where a military patrol had been engaged during the night. I had a number of meetings arranged in County Armagh, principally to ensure that instructions to sleep away from home were being carried out. Intelligence was flowing in now indicating that Faulkner would make his swoop before Thursday, when the Derry march was due. He was in a cleft stick, facing Orange resignations if he banned it and British hostility if he didn't. Internment would buy off the Orangemen, if he ordered it within three days. Word came out of Crumlin Road prison that a whole wing there had been cleared and was being held ready. On top of this, sightings of various Special Branch men were reported at sea, air and land exits from the North. They couldn't block all the escape routes. If any of the key staff people were picked up when zero hour came, it would be through bad luck or carelessness rather than surprise. The main purpose of my trip with Joe was to see them and ram that home personally.

We got back to Belfast from Armagh between six and seven o'clock on Sunday evening. By this time things were very tense. There had been more demonstrations outside the paratroopers' headquarters in the Springfield Road, and trouble was building up again in the Ardoyne and elsewhere. Saboteurs blew up the boilers of the big power station at Ballylumford, near Larne, throwing another heavy compensation claim on the county council which the Brits in turn would have to foot. It was effective economic warfare, and it did not knock out the power supply.

Later that evening we went over to the Third Battalion's area for a meeting with their staff. I briefed them on policy to be adopted when internment was introduced. I was very impressed by several intelligent questions from the young bearded man who sat next to me. He was Paddy McAdorey, the Third's operations officer.

The story of Paddy and his young wife Rose is a tragic one, almost a story of Ireland's own tragedy in miniature. They had been married

the previous winter. At that time, Republicans were being tried for paying military honours at funerals, and forty young Belfast women were arrested for wearing black berets and anoraks in protest outside the court. A few days after her wedding, Rose was sentenced to six months' imprisonment. When I was sitting beside her husband at that meeting, she had just been released. Before another day was out, Paddy had been killed in action in the Ardoyne. The young couple had known only a few weeks of married happiness.

After reviewing the immediate situation with other leading Republicans in Belfast, I was not one hundred per cent satisfied. The movement still showed more or less the preliminary attitude of revolutionary enthusiasm. It had not yet moved into the real guerrilla mentality of always offering the least possible target. But there was no more I could do now, and I went back to the Drumms' place, where Mary and Sinéad were waiting for me.

I had arranged for a safe car to pick us up there not later than ten o'clock that night. When an hour went by and it had not turned up, I got uneasy. Jimmy Drumm tried to prevail on us to stay over and go south in the morning, but I did not want to chance it. I was just starting to organise alternative transport when the car arrived, the driver satisfying me that the delay was unavoidable.

We left Belfast at five minutes to midnight on August 8, crossed the border and in about fifty minutes, reached the spot in north Louth where I had left my own car. As we changed over, my last words to the driver were, "Whatever you do, don't go home. There could be a round-up in the morning." He assured me he wouldn't. As soon as we got home I fell straight into bed. I was awakened, it seemed almost immediately, by the phone ringing. It was Belfast reporting that internment had begun.

The Brits had moved at three o'clock that morning, August 9, under Section Twelve of the Special Powers Act, which permitted people to be held indefinitely without charge or trial on Faulkner's authority. Reaction throughout the North had been violent, and the cities seemed to be almost in a state of siege.

The Drumms' house had been raided. Paratroopers had arrived at about 3.45, taking Jimmy and his teenage son Seán away in a truck. I had missed arrest by the skin of my teeth. Later I heard that my driver of the night before, ignoring my warning, had gone home and had been picked up too.

First reports created the impression that the operation had been a

most thorough one, and I waited anxiously for further details. As they came in, the intelligence picture seemed to clear, then became very confused again. The most puzzling thing that emerged was that although very few of our own members were unaccounted for, the Brits had lifted literally hundreds of people. Who on earth could they be?

Maudling was interviewed in a broadcast and gave away the secret deal he had made with Faulkner in London the previous Thursday – internment in exchange for a ban on all political marches including the Apprentice Boys' march in Derry. Faulkner also broadcast during the morning. But what he was saying simply did not fit the facts. He claimed that the action he had ordered was not "in any way punitive or indiscriminate. The main target of the present operation is the Irish Republican Army."

This was what we had expected from the information we had at our disposal. It was logical that an internment operation would try to paralyse the military wing of the Republican movement. But this was not what was happening. The majority of the people seized sounded unbelievable at first. They included executive members of the Civil Rights Association, who had been going around criticising violence, members of the People's Democracy, members of the Gaelic Athletic Association, people arrested instead of their relatives, and people we had never heard of at all. Of three hundred and forty-two people taken away that Monday, fewer than sixty had anything to do with the IRA. Before noon, using elementary security procedure, I managed to contact every local leadership in the North.

It did not surprise me to hear that, of those members we did lose, several had not followed instructions. Some had stayed away from home several nights in a row, but had returned thinking the heat was off. One of the most annoying losses was Francie McGuigan in Belfast. He had slept away all right. But when the sweep seemed to be over, he had gone down to a house to get a cup of tea and make contact. The Brits caught him.

As more details came in, it became obvious that this was completely unlike any previous internment policy experienced in Ireland, whether North or South. The tactical purpose had always been to deliver a knock-out blow to the movement, picking up selected men in a co-ordinated intelligence operation led by the Special Branch with an armed back-up. But this was no silent swoop in the night. The British arrived in Saracens, three-tonners *and even*

furniture vans. In many places vigilantes and women residents spotted them coming, the alarm was given with whistles and dustbin lids, and warnings were quickly passed from area to area.

The round-up was crudely conducted with noise and force. Doors were smashed in. People were injured by rubber bullets at point-blank range and shots were fired into ceilings. The soldiers made the arrests themselves, often ignorant of local circumstances and not sure whom they were looking for. People who protested that they were not the men in question were told, "It doesn't matter. You'll do." Some were not even allowed to dress or put on their shoes.

As news of the raids spread, whole neighbourhoods came into the streets and the sweep continued in an atmosphere of bedlam. In Derry, the people reacted with such fury that the troops could not complete the operation and left with the men they had taken already. Wives who naturally wanted to know where their husbands were being taken to were answered with obscenities.

To explain the behaviour of the troops on that operation, we had to conclude either that the British army throughout the North had suddenly decided to act in an undisciplined manner or that its senior officers had given it a free hand to do so. It was obvious, however, that the troops' behaviour was official policy.

It would have been a mistake to think only of the tactical value of internment. What was also taking place was a huge psychological warfare operation with a combined strategy consisting of two elements. The first objective was to produce a mass intimidation of the entire Nationalist population on a far bigger scale than the 1970 Lower Falls experiment. The second was to provide the British interrogators with a large pool of subjects, on whom individual psychological terror was used to get information about the IRA.

The Republican movement had to face up to it. From August 9, 1971, onwards we were in a totally new kind of warfare for Ireland.

The weakness of the tactical objective can be quickly seen. From the tactical point of view, the correct time to move would have been six months earlier, as soon as the IRA killed the first British soldier, Gunner Curtis, at the beginning of February. Another half-year gave the IRA more time to expand, to prepare, to train, to acquire more equipment, to consolidate support in Derry. In that half-year, too, our units had built up battle confidence, inflicting fatal casualties even on the toughest British crack troops, such as the Parachute Regiment. And they were in a position to mount a really massive

response to internment. In fact, it was a decided relief that the movement could so quickly readapt to and withstand the new situation.

By the first day it was obvious that internment had failed on every level except one. We could not tell yet how much intelligence they might have obtained.

British Prime Minister Heath and Faulkner had taken a desperate gamble, and they had lost. The British government's part in it had been particularly cynical. The deal of internment in exchange for a ban on marches was agreed in London on Thursday, the very day before the Westminster parliament went into summer recess. The Tories would be out of reach if it went wrong. On the crucial day of August 9, Heath was sailing his *Morning Cloud* in the Fastnet race. Political "guidance" was in the hands of Maudling, who had already said he believed in leaving matters to "the men on the spot." The men on the spot meant Faulkner, the generals, and the counter-insurgency specialists itching to try out theories, techniques, weaponry on the Irish people in "stability operations" and "populace control."

The intensity and severity of the Nationalist communities' reaction to internment was far greater than Faulkner or the British had estimated. I have already explained how their miscalculations arose from the Lower Falls incident the previous year. That reaction in itself would have been enough to cause violent escalation. But the bloodshed was unnecessarily increased by Faulkner's own irresponsible claims, and by the behaviour of the British. Both fed the sectarian fires.

The Loyalist hard-liners were delighted by the humiliation inflicted on the Nationalist areas on internment day. But prisoners taken that morning later told how British army drivers deliberately drove out of their way to pass through Loyalist areas on the way to the holding centres. The extreme Unionist right wing correctly saw internment as a gesture by Faulkner to please them. They knew that hundreds had been arrested. They heard Faulkner declare that the main target was the IRA. When they saw the "IRA men" being brought through their areas in the army trucks, they understandably assumed that the Republican movement had been at last dealt with by the "authorities." Faulkner went on that week to make the altogether ludicrous statement that "internment is working out remarkably well." And the security chiefs carried propaganda to the

point of insanity by saying that seventy per cent of the people wanted had been arrested, including a high proportion of the IRA leadership.

Naturally believing the odds against them to be greatly reduced, the Loyalist extremists decided to "help the army" to subdue the seething Nationalist districts. Loyalist snipers opened heavy fire on the Ardoyne. When the Ardoyne Relief Committee asked the British to stop them, they were told that no troops were available. To the UVF, who had kept quiet for a year after being repulsed in Ballymacarret, the opportunity now looked ripe indeed. Armed UVF members emerged to intervene on a large scale — only to meet a shattering response from IRA units in unexpected strength.

That Monday was the worst day the North had seen since 1969. There was fighting in Derry, Newry, Armagh, Lurgan, Strabane, but most of all in Belfast. The Nationalist people simply rose up in outright defiance of the British army. A widespread civil disobedience campaign was initiated, fully supported and endorsed by the Republican leadership, including the withholding of all rent and rates. Enormous weight swung behind the IRA. Co-operation between the civilian resistance and Republican units was spontaneous and increasingly close, particularly on the big estates in west Belfast. Crowds would draw troops towards them, then scatter to leave the British as open targets for the volunteers.

There was heavy fighting at some of the barricades which had been strengthened during the night. When the military tried to demolish these, the people countered by overturning vehicles and setting them on fire to create barricades which were literally too hot to handle. This tactic also assisted night sniping. The first soldier killed in internment week was one of the Green Howards regiment who was shot while trying to cross a section of road lit by a blazing car. The British in turn brought up heavy armoured carriers and bulldozers to try to move these defences. What could be done about neutralising armour and bulldozers very simply was shown in a heartening report I received on one volunteer who acted on his own initiative.

This lad went out with his young brother in a rural area, armed with nothing but a small power-saw. He quickly blocked one road by sawing down trees and telephone poles, then moved on and blocked another just as rapidly. When the blockages were noticed, the British sent out a force to deal with them. First of all, two troop-carrying helicopters looked over the roads and the surrounding terrain. Then they landed a strong patrol, some of them taking up defensive

positions, while the rest checked to find out whether the blocks were a prelude to an ambush. They spent a long time hunting for wires or other signs of a landmine.

When they were satisfied at last that the first block was safe, up the road came a heavy column consisting of two armoured cars escorting a bulldozer. It took several hours to reconnoitre, check out and clear each blockage. At the height of an emergency situation, more than forty members of the British forces, two helicopters, a couple of armoured cars and a bulldozers were tied down for the best part of a day to undo ten minutes' work by a lad and his brother with an ordinary power-saw. Initiative like this is the really unbeatable guerrilla weapon. A few teams with such everyday tools could hold up military traffic across a whole county.

Belfast by now was a battlefield. A street in the Ardoyne was on fire from end to end. In east Belfast four factories and the bus depot were burning. To the west, Andersonstown and Ballymurphy had shaken the Brits with their aggressive resistance. From the Springfield Ridge, Orange mobs including armed UVF and Tartan gangs came down to attack neighbouring Nationalist districts. In the mixed community of Springfield Park a priest, Father Hugh Mullan, was shot dead while giving the last rites to one of the victims.

Faulkner had the impertinence to address part of a broadcast specially to the Catholic community, telling them that internment would "remove the shadow of fear" from them. This ignored the fact that it was the enraged people of the Nationalist areas themselves who were on the warpath, as all observers and British troops in Belfast were only too aware. Regardless of shadows of fear, in some localities it was as much as IRA officers could do to get the people to leave the fighting to their own units. The central confrontation was between the people and the British army.

As the fighting continued to escalate, Maudling's idiotic statement that the security forces had "by and large" got the men they wanted faced the British with grave political embarrassment. Not one of the "prominent IRA leaders" alleged to have been pulled in had been named. If this was what the Brits said was a success, well might everybody wonder what a British disaster was supposed to be. By that afternoon, some senior British officers in Belfast were saying openly that they were not really in favour of internment. It would make their military task harder. They were damn right about that. It was a pity they didn't press the point harder before their psychological warfare operation recoiled on them.

When they finally realised that there was going to be no Union Jack success story that anybody above the age of five was likely to believe, the British media tried blaming the South and Jack Lynch.

Paddy McAdorey and two other volunteers of the IRA, Eamonn Lafferty and Séamus Simpson, gave their lives that week defending their people.

Comparatively light though IRA casualties were that week, these defensive battles were costing the lives of experienced and sorely missed men. Sustained firefights meant that volunteers were presenting themselves as targets either through firing too long from one position and being located, or through being caught in the enemy's sights while moving to a new one. But the first priority had to be the defence of the Belfast communities as long as they remained under attack. That meant that for the time being there was no opportunity to resort to the more profitable guerrilla tactics that were to prove so effective later on.

Another consequence of prolonged street fighting was the heavy consumption of ammunition. In the circumstances, this was unavoidable. Although many Nationalist homes had already been destroyed, entire districts might have been razed were it not for the heavy defensive fire that kept the mobs from penetrating deeper into them.

The policy succeeded. The Loyalist crowds had learned at last that frontal attacks in force on Nationalist areas were too costly. Certainly they had been cruelly deluded by Faulkner and Maudling into believing that the Republicans sting had been drawn. At any rate, it was the fighting effectiveness of the Provisional IRA, and nothing else, that week in August 1971 which finally checked the mass sectarian attacks that had gone on intermittently in the North for fifty years. No politician can ever take that from the Republican movement, or from the volunteers who gave their lives in achieving it. It was because the old tactics of mob terror could no longer prevail against a determined IRA that the Loyalist extremists have since turned to individual assassinations of Nationalists.

Five days after the killing of Harry Thornton, which had first enraged the people, the open confrontation in Belfast came to an end, though rioting in Derry continued for another two days. The first week of internment had brought twenty-four fatal casualties, including three IRA volunteers and three British soldiers. Eighteen members of the movement were wounded in action, and between a hundred and forty and a hundred and fifty British. Flak jackets had

undoubtedly kept many of the British wounded from being killed, at least by low-velocity bullets. Almost two hundred and fifty houses had been destroyed by fire, and conservative first estimates of damage in Belfast for the week ran well over a million pounds. This was the outcome of the Tory and Unionist leaders' success.

To emphasise to the world the emptiness of their claims, John Kelly suggested to me a daring and dangerous step. Seeing its undeniable value, I agreed to it. This was the famous Republican press conference for the international media held in Belfast itself that Friday, right under the noses of the enemy. John went up and arranged it. Paddy Kennedy introduced Joe Cahill to correspondents and photographers in a school building in Whiterock, while enemy motorised patrols were rumbling up and down the roadway outside only a few yards away, keeping a keen lookout for the IRA. Joe admitted quite frankly that supplies of ammunition were running low after a week's heavy fighting, and hoped that Irish people would actively support the struggle in the North. Some of the British accounts of the occasion were a bit surly, but the international media went overboard for "the Provo press conference." Their stories and pictures went all over the globe. The whole affair was a brilliant piece of propaganda which well and truly twisted the lion's tail.

It turned out later that one of those who reported the press conference was the former Brigadier Michael Calvert, a one-time commander of the SAS who was now writing for magazines about counter-insurgency methods. There were some very odd journalists going around Belfast those days, and there still are. But they could not prevent the enormous success of that Republican counter-tactic in psychological warfare.

Sympathy and support for the people of the North rose to a new peak after the imposition of internment and the realisation that the resistance had now begun in grim earnest. Everywhere men and women of Irish birth and descent rallied to the cause of national freedom. Substantial sums of money were subscribed and collected throughout Ireland, Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and, in fact, wherever there were still Irish people who resented injustice.

Once again, too, an extraordinary assortment of military arms appeared out of the South, including rifles, short arms and even sub machine-guns. I frankly would not have believed this possible. Twice we were certain that the Twenty-Six Counties had been scoured

clean, in August 1969 and again in 1970. But there it was. Two months after internment, the South was still producing. For many months, until matters improved, this material from the South, along with what had been obtained in 1969 and again in 1970, formed the basis of the equipment issued to the Northern units. With the fortunes of war, some of it was later captured in enemy searches. British MPs, of the type who are convinced that Moscow is behind everything, demanded to know where it was made. The Ministry of Defence was obliged to reply at the end of 1971: "Austria, Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States and the USSR. Most of the weapons are twenty-five or more years old, and the country of manufacture is no guide as to the source of supply." For a long time, that was what the Provisional IRA had to oppose powerful British forces equipped to NATO scale. Only by developing original and effective operational tactics was it possible to build up what has been described as the most successful urban guerrilla army of the present day.

The only way to intensify the resistance at the military level was to keep the initiative. This could only be done by turning now to true guerrilla principles and sticking to them. But these principles would have to be expressed in new tactics and new combinations that would be unfamiliar to the British. It was no good presenting them with a campaign too much like those which had succeeded in Israel and Cyprus, effective though these undoubtedly were. The British had studied them well and would know what to do. There had been a somewhat optimistic view in some IRA staff circles earlier on that the British would not dare to be as hard on the civilian population in what they claimed as British territory as they had been in other colonial repressions. Nobody believed that any more. The aim was clearly to break the spirit of the population in the hope that the military effort would collapse.

Faulkner's talk about "removing the shadow of fear" could now be seen as a warning not to support the IRA. You don't get at the pips without squeezing the lemon, or so their thinking went. But if the people were expected to "expose" and "flush out" their own relatives and neighbours in the Republican movement, the pressure required would obviously have to be immense. The British had no scruples about applying it. Perhaps nobody should have been surprised. It was 1971, and these were the weapons of modern warfare.

That week in August escalated the conflict not just in scale and ordinary intensity, but in the British use of counter-insurgency terror techniques. At first the troops' brutal behaviour seemed completely illogical and meaningless. Passers-by were stopped and asked where they lived. When they gave their addresses, they were beaten up. The troops were sober and under command, but this apparently senseless behaviour now became widespread. It had the effect of confusing many people who were already living in a high state of tension. Five doctors in the area, including Dr James Rial and Dr John Bunting, who had practised in the Falls for thirty years, testified fully to the effects on their patients. Dr Bunting witnessed one such beating-up outside his own window. The doctors said they had to prescribe tranquillisers for the majority of the people they saw. But on the weekend after internment the supply of tranquillisers to the chemists' shops in the Falls mysteriously ceased. "They either can't or will not bring in new stocks," one of the doctors said. Meanwhile, the British Medical Association had protested against a new regulation under the Special Powers Act. This forced doctors to report all patients with gunshot wounds to the RUC or the British military under the threat of fines and imprisonment. Many were refusing to obey it.

Needless to say, all such pressures failed to secure the quite impossible objective of separating the IRA from their own people. In the North, the disastrous British enforcement of internment had enormously strengthened the very base it was supposed to weaken. And in the South, it increased sympathy for the Nationalist people to an extent greater than any that had been known since 1922. An endless coming and going of visitors at Kevin Street, the Sinn Féin headquarters in Dublin, at other offices of the movement, at my own house, and at those of my colleagues brought money, tinned food, medical supplies, blankets, children's clothes and all manner of useful items.

The value of internment was most striking of all in its effect on the IRA's personnel strength. When everybody had been accounted for in our own check-out of all units and staffs, we knew that only fifty-six members of the Provisional IRA had been interned. Adding the three volunteers killed in action, the total depletion was fifty-nine. Against this, during the following weeks the intake of new members was so great that it caused serious difficulties in several areas. They had real problems getting this influx properly integrated

into the movement and putting the new volunteers to work. And as Derry people know, there was nothing for it there but to open a waiting list.

This was not the only result. Strength was further increased by NLF units which came over to the Provisional IRA as soon as internment was introduced, and by some independent groups on top of that. After the 1969 split the Strabane unit had stayed with the NLF until internment, then came over *en masse*. Nine days after internment day, the British committed an act which guaranteed the alienation of Strabane for good and all (though God knows, with the highest unemployment rate in the North, it was well on that road already). A commando whose identity was concealed at the inquest as "Marine A" deliberately shot a civilian dead after an anti-internment protest meeting. The British army claimed he was a "terrorist" who had drawn a pistol. But the poor man, Eamon McDevitt, was a deaf mute. All he had done was to pick up one of the spent rubber bullets which had a ready sale as souvenirs among visitors to the North.

There was no let-up in the brutality. On the same day, fifteen hundred troops entered the Bogside in Derry to remove barricades and killed another young man. When two MPs, John Hume and Ivan Cooper, protested they were roughly arrested and hustled away. Heath was back in London by now. There could be no excuse that this was going on without his knowledge. But the army had been given a free hand, and it was using it. On the next day, a boy of sixteen died from his wounds. This was too much. Facing the wrath of the Nationalist people for serving such a regime, prominent Catholics announced that they were withdrawing from public office. Gauging the mood of the South correctly, Lynch sent a telegram of protest to Heath calling for an end to internment. Heath sent him an angry reply telling him not to interfere "in the affairs of the United Kingdom." That was taken in the South for the piece of stubborn arrogance it was, and anti-British feeling escalated still more steeply. In ten days, the military repression had produced a situation that Faulkner could no longer control. Stormont and Unionist rule were finished. By "acting in support of the civil power" the British army had succeeded in destroying it. With cleverer politicians than the Tories in power, it could be suspected that this was exactly what London wanted to do, so that a reformed system of government for the North could be set up and colonial control retained. But the

simple answer is that they got themselves into a mess. The politicians let the army use psychological repression methods they did not understand on a people and a country they did not understand. But there was worse ahead yet.

The military motive for internment was more complicated than the political motive, which was simply to keep Faulkner in power. The senior British officers who said they believed that internment would not work in the long run were not telling the whole story. Once it was on, the British were determined to get the maximum advantage out of it in the short run. The internment operation on August 9 gave them a chance for an exercise in psychological violence, both to the population and to individuals. If it worked, they would be able to create a massive shock effect that might avert the need to bring in ever larger numbers of troops to hold the North down. From the arrested men themselves, what the British chiefly wanted was intelligence.

When internment was introduced, the commander of 39 Airportable Brigade, responsible for the Belfast area, was Brigadier Frank Kitson, whose name was then little-known to the public. He had made a reputation in Malaya, Kenya and other colonial liberation struggles as a counter-insurgency specialist. In Kenya he was Military Intelligence Officer for the Nairobi area and started a "special methods" training centre. Kitson's book *Low Intensity Operations* caused a lot of discussion in military circles, and in civilian circles, too. It advocated much greater use of the British army in social and industrial situations which he believed might arise in Britain. Kitson said that the military should be brought in at a very early stage in such situations to develop intelligence, instead of the usual practice of leaving these matters to the political section of the Special Branch of the police force. He was a cold and dedicated man, and by all accounts not much liked by his troops.

When the British arrived in force in the North, they found that the RUC intelligence effort was not up to providing the particular kind of information required for effective counter-insurgency operations, nor even a clear picture of the Republican movement. Kitson pointed out that the guerrilla stage of a revolutionary war is fought by people who strike at a time and place of their own choosing and then disappear by merging into the population. This is an even bigger problem for an army of occupation relying on conventional forces and conventional methods.

What Kitson put his finger on, of course, was that in general police work does not produce enough *tactical* information which the military can use for operational purposes. The professional intelligence agencies were always trying to work out schemes for planting agents in the leadership of target organisations they wanted to penetrate. Kitson's attitude was that a lot of low-grade information was more useful for counter-insurgency purposes than a small amount of high-grade stuff. One lead would take them to another, and the counter-insurgency troops would be better able to go after a definite target which they would create themselves, instead of waiting for an IRA active service unit to show themselves briefly before vanishing again.

A British document makes it clear what kind of information they were after in August 1971. They were short of many different kinds of hard intelligence, and it amounted to quite a "shopping list." Their objectives were to establish the identities of members of both the Provisional IRA and the NLF, with positions held in the organisations; details of "the organisation and structure of IRA units and sub-units"; details of possible operations; arms dumps; safe houses; communications and supply routes "including those across the border"; locations of wanted persons; details of morale, operational objectives and propaganda techniques; relations with other groups and movements; information on those responsible for eighty-five unexplained incidents on RUC files; future plans, etc.

That was fair enough. It was the job of enemy intelligence officers to get such information. The IRA expected a certain amount of brutality to captured members of the movement, and progress had been made in training methods to help volunteers to keep their wits about them under interrogation. The lengths to which the British went in trying to get this kind of information, however, were far beyond anything they had resorted to in Ireland before, and they have long since become a matter of international concern. In considering the techniques of torture and interrogation referred to here, the reader must bear in mind that the men they were used on were legally supposed to be citizens of the United Kingdom.

On Wednesday, two days after the internment swoop, men who were released complained that they had been treated with a quite extraordinary kind of brutality while they were held. It sounded like some kind of science fiction. It wasn't. It was discovered to be only too true.

The British government was bound by the United Nations *Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners*. From the first moments of the internment operation on August 9, the British troops violated these rules with total contempt, if indeed they had been told about them at all.

In combat conditions, the best time to interrogate a prisoner for intelligence is within minutes of his capture, when he is surrounded by strangers and not very sure of himself. On August 9 none of those brought in was captured in combat. The men had been taken in their own towns and cities on familiar ground and could immediately start thinking about the most sensible way to act under questioning. British tactics in the round-up were clearly designed to counter this. Arrests were conducted with open force, the men's relatives insulted obscenely and homes damaged. Prisoners were deliberately confused and kept in a high state of tension from the start. It happened on too wide a scale throughout the North to be accounted for as indiscipline among the troops. It was evident psychological policy.

The first stage of that policy was to degrade the prisoners and try to destroy their own self-respect. This began as soon as they were shoved into the British vehicles. Witnessed statements from men arrested in different districts show the same pattern.

"I was transferred to a lorry, made to lie face down on the floor, covered with blankets and struck with rifles. There were other detainees, some lying on top of each other" (Joseph Hughes, Belfast 14). "During the time I was kicked my head was constantly rapped with a baton, then my nose was in the flat of the lorry, as ordered" (Séan McKenna, Newry). "We were forced to lie on our backs in this lorry with our hands behind our heads. As we lay there we received the odd kick for no apparent reason. . . . In the lorry I was subjected to general abuse like 'Irish bastards' " (Michael Joseph Donnelly, Derry City). The degradation technique continued at the holding centres. "They used their fists and boots. All the while they kept shouting 'IRA bastard, Catholic f---er' " (James Auld, Girdwood Park Camp). "'Fenian bastards' was the common phrase" (Séan McKenna, Ballykinlar Camp). "The staff sergeant instructed us that *swill* was now being served " (Michael Harvey, Ballykinlar).

The second stage, still at the holding camps, was to make the prisoners feel that the British army were the absolute masters and must be obeyed, no matter what illogical commands were given. "I felt that I had a right to have a legal representative present. My

military escort replied, 'You've got no f---ing rights, mate' " (Michael Harvey). "I was then forced to run fast in my bare feet across an obstacle course with stumps of trees, sharp stones, broken glass, tacks. I was accompanied by military police with dogs barking. As I went through a pile of garbage they said, 'Go on, you're only garbage' " (Gerard McErlean, Girdwood Park Camp). "I was taken over the obstacle course several times, as were the other detainees" (Kevin Hannaway, Girdwood). Men were forced to carry out physical exercises in kneeling positions or lying prone before NCOs. "These exercises commenced at 10.00 am and lasted until 2.00 pm, four hours of torture. . . . On Tuesday we were forced to do running exercises outside on the road — run, stop, turn, etc. These I think were to make an independent character obey" (Michael Harvey). "They shouted, 'Crawl like a dog, you bastard. You are a dog' " (Gerard McErlean).

At this stage and later, strange measures were taken to impress on prisoners that priests and doctors would not intervene on their behalf. At Girdwood, a man in chaplain's uniform introduced himself to prisoners as Father Kenny, a Catholic priest. "I was disgusted to see a priest mixed up in this brutality. Later he seemed to laugh at us as we were forced across the obstacle course" (McErlean). A medical officer at Ballykinlar rejected complaints. "His reply was, 'This is a f---ing military camp, not Butlin's' " (Harvey). "From a doctor after reviving me, 'If I am needed to dispatch him I can be found at the country club' " (Patrick Joseph McClean, Beragh, Tyrone). Some of the figures who posed as doctors in certain interrogations were undoubtedly bogus, but the behaviour of real British army doctors towards detained men was also to be called into question by many of their civilian colleagues in Britain and Ireland.

It deserved to be. The next stage was the notorious pre-interrogation techniques since denounced by the leading British scientific periodical *Nature* and many other learned quarters as "psychological brutality." It could only be undertaken with the complicity of doctors who ignored their Hippocratic oath.

During my own years in prison I had heard many stories about how men broke up in solitary confinement, but nobody I was with in Wormwood Scrubs was in a position to explain the scientific reasons. When evidence of these experiments in the North came out, psychiatrists made them clear. The brain works normally as long as it gets enough oxygen and sugar. But its working is interfered with if it

does not receive the everyday sensory impulses it is used to. If what the brain needs is shut off, mental disturbance results. The technique of deliberately shutting it off is the method of mental torture known as “sensory deprivation.”

It was well understood in some totalitarian societies as a secret police method of preparing prisoners for interrogation. If a prisoner is completely isolated for several weeks in a dark, silent cell on bread and water, his brain is deprived of sugar, and the senses have nothing to act on. If he is kept from lying down, the blood supply to his brain is reduced. If he is not allowed to know where he is being held, his disorientation is still greater. He becomes confused and has great difficulty in concentrating. When he is considered to be sufficiently “softened up” he is taken out for interrogation. By then, unless he is exceptionally tough, he is likely to be in a dazed condition. The interrogator will probably be the first person the prisoner has had any conversation with in weeks, and he immediately becomes a very important person to the prisoner. The interrogator is in a position to create further confusion in the prisoner’s mind. He may alternate between speaking to him civilly, threatening him, taking no notice of rational answers, and asking questions that seem to the prisoner to be nonsense. After a period of this, the prisoner may have great difficulty distinguishing between facts he is trying to remember and fantasy which the interrogator is suggesting.

An extremely important point about the whole procedure is that it is a way of getting confessions. As a method of getting detailed military intelligence, such a technique, which deliberately impairs the prisoner’s ability to remember details accurately, is quite obviously counter-productive.

Why, then, did the British experiment with “sensory deprivation” techniques in the North in 1971? We know that Kitson wanted precise, hard intelligence. The British were not short of expert interrogators who could have processed the prisoners taken in the round-up by proper means. The conclusion is clear. One school of opinion within the British army certainly wanted counter-insurgency leads for operational intelligence. But another group was interested in trying out techniques to assess their effects on human beings.

Brainwashing was not merely a totalitarian practice, as Cold War propaganda led many people to believe. In 1960 a professor named Kennedy who had been an army major revealed in a lecture to the Royal Institution that similar techniques had been used in attempts

to extract information from prisoners while he was serving at the Combined Services Detailed Interrogation Centre outside Cairo in the Second World War. They had since been used in Cyprus and elsewhere. A leading London psychiatrist immediately pointed out that such methods were as likely to produce false "confessions" as true ones. But British intelligence seems to have taken no notice.

They continued these experiments, and discovered a cheap short-cut. Softening up a prisoner by means of "black room" isolation ordinarily required patience. The prisoner had to be transferred to some place where such facilities were available. It was found that keeping the prisoner hooded produced similar effects in a fraction of the time. Forcing him to stand at a wall for hour after hour, supported only by his finger-tips, reduced blood supply to his head as effectively as chaining him upright in a cell. A diet of bread and water served at six-hour intervals kept the brain short of sugar. A so-called "noise machine," identified as a simple electronic circuit made in British service workshops and weighing no more than three-quarters of a pound, bombarded the brain with monotonous sound of a certain pitch. Finally, an ordinary tape recorder, out of sight, added weird cries, screams and other demented sound-effects.

These short-cut techniques and the use of simple equipment permitted the British to set up a sophisticated psychological torture operation without a fixed base. It could be used anywhere prisoners could be held securely. When I say sophisticated I am referring to the principles. The routine was not put in a manual, obviously, for fear of official embarrassment if one found its way into the wrong hands. But it was not very complicated, as this British official note shows: "Officers and men of the English Intelligence Centre held a seminar on the procedures in Northern Ireland in April 1971 to teach orally the procedures to members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary."

Selected prisoners were taken from the holding centres to undergo these "procedures." "Then the black hood was put over our heads. This hood was made double, i.e. two layers of cloth all around. There were no mouthpiece or sights in it. It was impossible to breathe through it; one had to suck air from below. . . It was a horrific sensation" (Michael Joseph Donnelly). "Could see helicopter and about six plain-clothed men in the distance. Plain-clothes men also beside us. Four blue bags produced and put over our heads. Short of breath because of bag. . . . Thinking how that Paisley had seized power in some way and that I would be executed or tortured to

death” (Patrick Shivers, Toomebridge). “The hood had been removed. I couldn’t even remember my children’s names or ages. I just couldn’t focus my mind. The voice kept saying, ‘Come on, Séan, think now. Keep thinking, Séan’ ” (S. McKenna). “Into boiler suit. Bag over head. Rough handling at all times. Made to stand against wall until I dropped. . . . After each session of questioning, ‘You have been telling us nothing but lies. Back to the black hole’ ” (P. J. McClean). “A hessian bag was placed over my head and I was then handcuffed. . . . The guards also tightened the hood over my head until I could hardly breathe. . . . I remember thinking that martial law had been declared and that they were going to shoot me” (K. Hannaway).

The hood, the noise machine and standing at the wall were used as a combined torture. “Taken into room. Noise like compressed-air engine in room. Very loud, deafening. Hands put against wall. Legs spread apart. Head pulled back by bag and backside pushed in. Stayed there for about 4 hours. Could no longer hold up arms. Fell down . . . slapped back up again. This must have gone on for 2 or 3 days; I lost track of time. No sleep. No food. Knew I had gone unconscious several times, but did not know for how long. One time I thought, or imagined I had died” (Patrick Shivers). “As the duration of my stance against this wall grew longer, the collapsing and falling became more frequent. . . . A further factor which played particularly on the mind was the constant pressure of a high-pitched hissing sound” (M. J. Donnelly). “Sounds. Compressed air escaping all the time . . . firing squad, singing” (P. J. McClean). “I thought it was a mental home and the noise of people crying, wailing, lamenting was dreadful . . . , the noise here must have been on a tape because it was so consistent and loud” (S. McKenna). “I heard strange noises, screams and my only desire was to end all the pain and confusion by killing myself. This I tried to do in my thoughts by striking my head on a pipe” (J. Auld).

Prisoners were taken to the interrogators and then returned to the “music room” for stretches of several more hours. Some said they went days without water and a doctor revived them with tablets when they collapsed. Towards the end of their ordeal, instead of the six-hourly slices of dry bread some were given watery stew which they had to eat with their fingers, or in other cases, rice. Some had been in the hood from August 10 to August 17. Even then, the disorientation method was continued. Men were given the impression

they had been taken to England in the helicopters. Michael Donnelly was told he was in Salisbury jail. In fact, he had been returned to Crumlin Road Prison. Men in hoods were forced out of the doors of the helicopters, thinking they were falling to their deaths from mid-air. Actually the machines were a few feet above the ground, but the shock was tremendous.

After the anger aroused by the internment swoop, the news of what had been done to the men in custody pushed the Nationalist population into almost total resistance. Faulkner could not cover it up for long. Once he signed detention orders against the men, priests and lawyers were entitled to see them, and their statements were obtained. Patrick Shivers, Michael Harvey and many others had to be released, as there was nothing whatever against them, and certain newspapers began to make fuller investigations.

The British had to give way and concede an official inquiry. Knowing full well what could be expected of a British inquiry into British behaviour, the vast majority of internees invited to give evidence refused to have anything to do with it. They were right. The inquiry, headed by Sir Edmund Compton, wholly ignored the psychological nature of the methods used, pretending that they only amounted to "physical ill-treatment." It explained that the forcible exercises inflicted on the men "were devised to counteract the cold." It offered a now-famous definition of cruelty: "Cruelty implies a disposition to inflict suffering, coupled with indifference to, or pleasure in, the victim's pain. We do not think that happened here."

This was too much for many doctors, scientists and other public men. At long last, it was realised in certain quarters in England that the treatment of the North was certain to rebound on Britain's international standing. The Compton report was rejected with contempt in learned journals.

The author Graham Greene wrote to *The Times*: "If I, as a Catholic, were living in Ulster today I confess I would have one savage and irrational ambition — to see Mr Maudling pressed against a wall for hours on end, with a hood over his head, hearing nothing but the noise of a wind-machine, deprived of sleep when the noise temporarily ceases by the bland voice of a politician telling him that his brain will suffer no irreparable damage. The effect of these methods extends far beyond the borders of Ulster. How can any Englishman now protest against torture in Vietnam, in Greece, in Brazil, in the psychiatric wards of the USSR, without being told

‘You have a double standard: one for others and another for your own country’.” Mr Greene had been an officer in the Secret Intelligence Service himself. He was speaking with some knowledge of the business.

But in spite of such protests by intellectuals, the British public continued to show blind incomprehension. An opinion poll in December revealed support for “tougher methods” of interrogation and a belief that internment would “make things better.” When a Sunday newspaper made these smug and callous attitudes known in Ireland, more than a few decided that they would personally give the Brits something to remember them by. Whereas the pre-internment mood had been fundamentally defensive, the spirit of the resistance was now transformed into a deadly, bitter hardness. From that autumn on, the IRA fought with the aggressiveness and the constant attacking determination that it was to maintain year after year.

The British made one more effort to justify their interrogation methods by setting up a second official inquiry. But it was an even more embarrassing disaster than the first. One member, Lord Gardiner, produced a dissenting minority report holding that these methods were “not morally justifiable.” He also said they were illegal.

This move left little to be said for the majority report by Lord Parker and the third member. As far as wriggling was concerned, it was even worse than the Compton report. “Essentially interrogation in depth,” it said, “consists in the main of questions and answers across a table. The techniques which have been criticised are in a sense ancillary activities.” Parker went on to defend these techniques on the extraordinary grounds that they “sometimes had the effect of establishing the innocence” of wanted people and the detainee himself!

The Parker report claimed that as a direct result of two operations involving fourteen interrogations, “a further seven hundred members of both IRA factions, and their positions in the organisations” were identified. “A further advantage,” it said, “was the ‘snowball’ effect generated by following up the information thus obtained.” Republican intelligence did not have to look far to find where his lordship picked up that idea since Brigadier Kitson, outlining his personal theory for developing background information, had referred to a “snowball” process.

This claim, of course, was utter rubbish. Having a genuine list of

seven hundred names and positions to start with would be an enemy intelligence officer's idea of paradise. If the so-called "snowball" effect had been anything but pure theory, the Brits could reckon to get a minimum of one more name for each on the list. At that rate, the IRA would have been crippled by late autumn and rolled up altogether by Christmas. There had to be some logical reason why the IRA had not disappeared. Only a gigantic guerrilla movement could withstand the losses claimed while maintaining a strategy of sustained attack and inflicting casualties among British soldiers at a tremendously increased rate. Alternatively, if they did have the information they claimed, the British must have had the worst intelligence officers in the history of warfare if they could not follow it up and break the back of the movement. The simple explanation, of course, is that they inflated the value of what information they did manage to get so as to be able to justify the methods of torture used.

The result of the internment round-up and the interrogation excesses was that the British succeeded in bringing into combat not a diminished, but a vastly reinforced Republican guerrilla army. Furthermore, the British completely lost the psychological warfare initiative for several months. There was not a chance in hell of weakening popular support for the IRA. Instead, the British were forced on to the defensive, not only in the face of world opinion, but against the criticisms of some of their own leading doctors, scientists and other prominent people. The Compton and Parker inquiries gained them no ground in Ireland, and owing to Lord Gardiner's dissenting report, very little anywhere else.

One paragraph alone of the Parker report more than demolished its own case. It was a terrifying insight into the mentality of imperialism. Of all impossible excuses it produced this: "Some or all (of these methods of interrogation) have played an important part in counter insurgency operations in Palestine, Malaya, Kenya and Cyprus and more recently in the British Cameroons (1960-61), Brunei (1963), British Guiana (1964), Aden (1964-67), Borneo/Malaysia (1965-66), the Persian Gulf (1970-71) and in Northern Ireland (1971)."

How could anyone still wonder what the Republican movement was fighting?

Chapter 13

The Tide Turns

Following the successful IRA press conference under the noses of the British patrols, and the world's amused reaction, Joe Cahill, who had been the acknowledged "star" of the proceedings, went to the United States to rally Irish-American support for the struggle. His visit was the subject of an immigration hearing in New York. Evidently the British were resorting to diplomatic pressure in the hope of countering the rising international sympathy for the oppressed Nationalist people. On his return to Dublin, he was questioned by the Special Branch for several hours and then released.

But feedback from our contacts abroad reported that a fair and balanced account of views and events in the Northern conflict was being presented by some of the European services. Swedish coverage we found in particular to be admirably open and well informed, and Lennart Winblad of Swedish radio and television was a correspondent I came to trust and like very much. Reports from Canada too indicated that interviews we did in Ireland were fairly handled on the whole. The same was true of Denmark and several other countries. We had mixed experiences with the various US broadcasting systems. Some presented Republican views straight, others mutilated and distorted them, but at least American viewers saw something of the movement engaged in the struggle.

Joe's return presented me with a problem. He was determined to head immediately for Belfast. I tried to argue him out of it. The British do not easily forgive anyone who makes fools of them in public, despite all the myths about their sense of humour. This was proved by the savage sentence on Gerry Fitzgerald, the volunteer whom we had earlier slipped out of the hospital when he was

supposed to be “dying” and who lived to ridicule their propaganda about him. Besides, if Joe were to be arrested, the propaganda benefit to the British would be considerable.

Nevertheless, he was adamant. He was a Belfast man, his place was in Belfast, and so on. In the end, I had to give him a direct instruction not to return to the North, and it was ratified by the Army Council. He was fairly disgruntled about it, but the ruling was for the good of us all, himself included.

It was the kind of problem that would have to be faced in other forms in the transition from open defensive warfare to a true guerrilla campaign. When a man, respected as a defender of his own community, is used to going about openly within it, it is a sharp change for him to make himself unnoticed. He must become an armed shadow that engages the enemy target and vanishes without offering one himself. New volunteers needed constant reminders that they were in a guerrilla movement specialising in the art of covert combat.

Cover, of course, was a military skill which the Brits could not use much in the cities. Governments which persist in using troops in a repressive urban police role deprive their soldiers of combat advantages they would otherwise have because of their training. “Asserting a strong military presence” is politician’s talk. There is a built-in contradiction in the whole idea of using troops in a political role, unless the population is the kind that is easily intimidated. And this was certainly not the case in Ireland. No matter what politicians may say, success in warfare still depends to a great extent on the element of surprise.

In Ireland, both North and South, security was in the hands of ministers with no military experience. (Faulkner was one of the many thousands of Loyalists who did not fight in the British forces in 1939–45). Tuzo and some of his senior officers represented the British army at the Joint Security Committee meetings at Stormont, but it was Faulkner who chaired them. The result of all the pull and tug between the politicians and the generals was ineffectiveness. The British army proved a disastrous failure in a political role, at the same time making poor use of standard combat principles in its military role.

The next phase of Republican strategy was largely intended to force them to extend the saturation policy to non-Nationalist areas, offering more targets still, while tying down their strength on static

duties. The IRA was going for a snowball effect too, but not the kind that Brigadier Kitson had in mind.

Most of the Unionist politicians were hiding behind the army. Indeed, on internment day one of them was deceitful enough to claim publicly that the step had been taken "on the advice of the security forces." But the line taken by Baillie, the Minister of Commerce, and others was to sell internment to the middle classes and businessmen "so that we can continue economic progress." If there had been economic progress for the Nationalist areas, particularly the badly neglected ones west of the River Bann, the struggle in the North would not have developed in the way it did. The political system and the economic system reflected each other completely. While either lasted, there would be neither justice nor freedom. They were both legitimate targets for attack.

Up to August 9 the sabotage offensive had been restricted to selected units in certain areas. With the introduction of internment, operational tactics were immediately changed. *All* units now went into a widespread bombing campaign against pre-listed economic targets. Although these operations were very much intensified and broadened, they were not unrestricted. To this day, many categories of target are not attacked by the IRA.

The other arm of the economic resistance was the civil disobedience campaign which continued with great solidarity in the Nationalist areas. Within nine weeks of internment, the rent and rates strike was really biting. Stormont admitted that it had already cost local authorities half a million pounds, but that figure was considerably rounded down. At the Sinn Féin Ard Fheis that autumn I called for extension of the payments strike to motor tax, hire purchase instalments, mortgages and other high-interest exploitation. People who had refused to fill in census forms also refused to pay fines, and several priests did likewise.

The real effect of internment on the economy, however, was to be seen in the overall figures. Up to the end of 1970, the cost of the disturbances was assessed by Stormont at £5,500,000. Less than four months after internment, the total had risen to £16,000,000 in damage, according to figures given by a Stormont junior minister, John Taylor. Unionist-dominated industry put losses for 1971 at £40,000,000. The Westminster House of Commons was told that military operations in the North would cost an extra £12,000,000 over and above "normal" expenditures for that year. Bombing

operations logged by the enemy themselves for the months before and after internment should have enabled their own commanders to talk sense: 78 in July, but almost 200 in September. But in spite of all evidence to the contrary, Major-General Ford, the new "hard man" who had been brought in on the eve of internment, assured the media in Belfast that the security forces were beginning to beat the IRA.

After internment, IRA policy towards members of the Ulster Defence Regiment and the Royal Ulster Constabulary was also altered. Prior to this, IRA units had had instructions that UDR personnel were not to be subjected to deliberate attack. These instructions were obeyed, and the only two occasions on which the UDR had suffered casualties were both due to their practice of travelling in military-style jeeps indistinguishable from British ones. Four thousand UDR men had been called out in support of the internment operation, once again freeing British troops to harass the Nationalist areas. A few weeks afterwards it was announced that its strength was to be raised to ten thousand, equipped with SLRs and Shorland armoured cars. The extension of the IRA sabotage offensive had as one of its objectives the tying down of British troops on static guard duties in the cities and on rural installations. The increased use of the UDR was intended to release them for operations. The UDR also began taking over full or part-time guard duties at RUC barracks.

The RUC, as well as the UDR, had taken part in Faulkner's desperate gamble that internment and the accompanying exercise in state terror would finally break the IRA and its support among the people. And RUC men had taken part in the brutal interrogation practices carried out on prisoners. They had lost their gamble.

From internment on, UDR and RUC personnel, like British soldiers, were treated as legitimate combatant targets at all times, whether on duty or not, armed or not, in uniform or not. This may sound a harsh ruling, but the facts of life were that IRA members were liable to be arrested or shot by any of these forces at any time. In addition, the RUC and UDR were the eyes and ears of the enemy intelligence machine, particularly in the detailed local knowledge of rural districts which would be so difficult for the occupation forces to obtain on their own. On the day after internment a UDR man on duty in Tyrone was shot dead and shortly afterwards a UDR sentry on a police barracks in Fermanagh was killed by an IRA sniper.

In the middle of August, as well as revising military policies and

supporting the campaign of civil disobedience and civil resistance, the Republican leadership announced proposals which put forward a fairer system of regional government within the framework of revolutionary political action.

Our proposals had been prepared several weeks before, but had been shelved to await an opportune moment for presenting them. Everybody knew why the war in the North had escalated so quickly, but it was equally important to let people know on what terms it could cease.

A five-point peace plan was produced: 1, immediate cessation of the British forces' campaign of violence against Irish people; 2, abolition of Stormont; 3, a guarantee of non-interference with a free election to establish Dáil Uladh and a new governmental structure for the entire country; 4, release of all political prisoners, tried or untried, both in Ireland and Britain; 5, a guarantee of compensation for all those who had suffered as a result of direct or indirect British violence.

Now, while our own goal would never cease to be that of an all-Ireland Republic, we did not for one moment propose that Northerners, of whatever belief, should be absorbed into the political machine system of government in the South. To build a decent, just new Ireland together, both the Stormont and Dublin systems would have to go into the melting pot. In this connection, the various formulas for a Council of Ireland heard occasionally in the past fifty years are only prescriptions for preserving these systems in different ways.

The four original provinces of Ireland form as sound and fair a base for a federal republic as any of the historic states or cantons which make up the successful national systems of West Germany, Switzerland or the United States itself. The adoption of the English parliamentary system had not brought content or success to either part of Ireland. In the North it had been manipulated to produce single-party rule, in the South to produce a huge, centralised bureaucracy. In both, it had failed to distribute economic opportunity fairly among the different regions. As unemployment and emigration thinned the population in such regions, particularly in the west, their constituency boundaries were redrawn and their direct representation in the central parliament was reduced. To make their case heard, they had to rely more and more on petitions and pressure groups.

Our proposals called for the formation of a regional parliament based not on six but on the original nine counties of Ulster. It would provide a natural forum for Ulstermen and Ulsterwomen to discuss political differences and try to work out their own political solutions which would avoid the disadvantages of schemes imposed by outside interests in London or elsewhere. This assembly would have its counterpart in a similar regional parliament for Connacht, and gradually Munster and Leinster as well. If the agreed form of central government for a new Ireland were also set up, the basis of a sound federal system with fair and balanced regional representation would then exist.

It was my suggestion that this all-Ulster regional assembly be known as Dáil Uladh (Assembly of Ulster). In discussions afterwards, it was sometimes put to me that the Gaelic title would offend Protestants in the North, but I believed that we should firmly commit ourselves to the ideal of an Irish island. These proposals, although radical, were right in step with a broad international trend away from over-centralised bureaucratic government and towards stronger regional autonomy. Those who criticised them then as visionary and unreal have since been proved wrong by the significant strengthening of nationalist sentiment in Scotland and Wales. The Republican regional government proposals deserve more objective examination than they were given at the time.

The statement announcing our proposals said that every effort should be made to end the agony of the people in the North as soon as possible. If the proposals, which were being publicly submitted to the British government, were accepted by midnight on September 8, the IRA would reciprocate by suspending military operations. The statement concluded: "Rejection of the proposals will leave the IRA with no option but to intensify its campaign for resistance to British military rule in Ireland."

I travelled across Dublin that night to take the proposals personally to the British embassy in company with a leading member of the movement from County Armagh. As we approached the embassy we were stopped by a Special Branch man from Dublin Castle. On telling him we had business there we were escorted to the door, where an official accepted the communication and assured us that he would hand it on to the ambassador.

The proposals attracted widespread attention and comment in the press, on radio and television. However, as Wednesday came around

with still no official reaction from the British, the situation was pre-empted by Harold Wilson, who disclosed a twelve-point reformist plan of his own. It was immediately recognisable as a step more than half-way towards direct rule of the North from London. It proposed that a British minister of cabinet rank be installed in the North on a permanent basis, working directly with London. Since Conservative and Labour politicians had agreed to maintain a bi-partisan approach to policy on the North, this was a highly significant development. It was widely interpreted as the writing on the wall for Stormont, after the dreadful consequences of internment.

Faulkner made a speech saying he rejected the Wilson plan, as though that meant anything. His government's days were now clearly numbered. In the meantime, no acceptance or rejection of the Republican terms was received from the British. Accordingly, when the deadline ran out on Wednesday, the IRA's operations were intensified. It had been no empty promise. The movement was fully capable of mounting a thorough offensive, and it simply went ahead and did so.

The British tried to maintain that their policy was a success by greatly increasing their rate of arrests and then pointing to the numbers of people pulled in. This was accompanied by wild claims of brilliant intelligence breakthroughs. In fact, the British arrested more than fifteen hundred people in the next four months, but there was much less publicity for the fact that they had to let almost a thousand of them go again. It was a short-sighted and foolish policy which led the British deeper and deeper into a trap of their own making. They now had to start a secure concentration camp at Long Kesh to hold those they detained.

The opening of the concentration camp further infuriated the people of the North and required further defensive efforts to justify its existence. It was therefore chiefly for the benefit of the British public and foreign opinion that the IRA was wiped out several times over on paper. Since the people in the North could see for themselves that the IRA offensive was *increasing* on a large scale, British credibility soon reached vanishing point. If the IRA activists were now behind the wire, who was shooting more British soldiers than ever and stepping up bombing operations? Getting still deeper into the red as far as explanations were concerned, the British were forced to come up with the theory of the "dying kick." According to this theory, any intensification of IRA operations meant that the

movement was at its last gasp before packing it all in, the British army was "getting on top of the terrorists," etc. By the end of 1971, this kind of stuff was so familiar that anybody who read the papers or watched television could practically recite it in their sleep. The war went on relentlessly. Three years later, the "dying kick" explanation was still being revived every now and then. In the meantime the IRA had developed into the most experienced guerrillas the British had ever faced.

Between internment day on August 9 and September 5, when our peace proposals were announced, seven British soldiers and two UDR men had already been killed, and at least a hundred and eighty British wounded. Internment had provoked the IRA into a tough new phase, and the units had come through it battle-hardened and ready to face up to even tougher combat. They were now ready to step up operations to a scale and scope that would prove to the world that internment had been a brutal flop.

Between them, the policies of Heath and Faulkner continued to provide the movement with recruits it would not have otherwise obtained. A father went into Long Kesh, his son went into the IRA.

It was the kind of situation that many young Frenchmen found themselves in during the war. The choice was to wait for the occupation forces to bang on the door at three in the morning, or to join the Resistance and feel less helpless. With the passions aroused by concentration camps, detention without trial and Britain's glaring betrayal of the democratic principles she preached to others, believe me, the movement had no need to worry about its strength.

It was remarkable how feelings rose and fell in the South. On the last Sunday in August, however, they were still running high, certainly among the people living along the Louth-Armagh border. Two British armoured cars crossed the border and appeared in the townland of Courtbann, to the south. They were immediately hemmed in by angry residents of the area, who blocked the road behind and sent word to the local IRA unit. The unit in question happened to be in a rest period, but mobilised quickly and crossed into County Armagh. Meanwhile, the completely unarmed civilians, ignoring the British troops' armament, set fire to one of the armoured cars, which the soldiers were forced to abandon. When the British force finally managed to get clear and cross back into the North, they were ambushed by the IRA unit which got into position, took

them on and inflicted casualties in the subsequent engagement. A corporal in the King's Hussars was killed and two or three other soldiers were wounded. An IRA officer was injured.

Heath's government demanded an inquiry by Dublin into the incident. But once again Lynch wasn't going to swim against the popular tide of the movement. He countered with a strong complaint mentioning thirty such incursions by British forces.

Another source of extreme friction on the border was the blowing up, or spiking, of "unapproved" roads by the British. John Taylor, the Stormont junior minister in charge of security, called for all but twenty or so cross-border routes to be made impassable. This was part of another frantic Unionist game. It now had to be claimed that the IRA's intensified campaign after the internment "success" was coming from outside and not inside the North. Dublin's failure to seal the border was the new explanation of the internment fiasco. Taylor said that the British did not have enough troops to man the border. Anybody who takes a look at this artificial frontier will quickly see why. It straggles for hundreds of miles in the most ridiculous directions, full of twists and turns, loops and salients. It was designed to gerrymander electoral districts on a deliberate sectarian basis, not for military defence. The British should have thought of that when they invented it. How Dublin was supposed to be able to seal it with its own small force of regular troops was not explained.

In an operation in mid-October the British army arrived on the border and proceeded to blow deep craters in many roads with explosive charges. The farming folk on both sides of the border relied on these roads to take their produce to market, bring in their crops and make their living. Women had now to walk miles to shop or collect children from school.

When military patrols came back later, they discovered to their intense annoyance that the craters had been filled in again. The local people, working sporadically in their own groups, or systematically with bigger teams of civil rights supporters, kept up this response. Time after time, the furious soldiers blew the roads up again. And time after time, just as regularly, the craters were filled in.

The results were inevitable. There were several clashes between troops and the residents of the areas involved. Local feeling turned completely against the British. The tactical aim had been to reduce

the operational efficiency of the IRA. The outcome was the exact opposite. The movement was able to involve more people in these areas than ever before in both civil and armed resistance.

In the border lands and inside the North alike, it was innocent civilians who were the main sufferers from the internment operations and their aftermath. There was a considerable increase in the number of civilians killed, mostly by the British army, and a substantial number in Belfast by Loyalist extremists. The number of civilians killed by the IRA in that period was in fact one.

This death was accidentally caused in the sabotage operation against the Electricity Board of Northern Ireland offices in Belfast at the end of August. Reasonable warning was given to evacuate civilian staff from the Electricity Board building. Unfortunately, the telephone operator did not pass on the warning immediately, but only mentioned it casually some five minutes later to a supervisor. The supervisor acted on it straightaway and tried to clear the building, but even then it appears that not all the personnel took the alarm seriously. The British press claimed that no warning was given, which naturally led people to believe that no heed had been paid to civilian lives. It was later proved conclusively that warning definitely *was* given, and if it had been acted upon in time, casualties would not have occurred.

Nobody regretted that death and the injuries suffered by other civilians more than the Republican movement. This was not only for the sake of the people themselves, but because it gave the impression that bombing operations were carried out at random, with no purpose or logic. It was necessary for the IRA to issue a statement the following week renewing warnings to people to stay away from government offices and places frequented by British troops. No resistance movement in history has ever succeeded in fighting a struggle for national freedom without some accidental casualties, but the Republican interest in retaining popular support clearly lay in causing as few as possible.

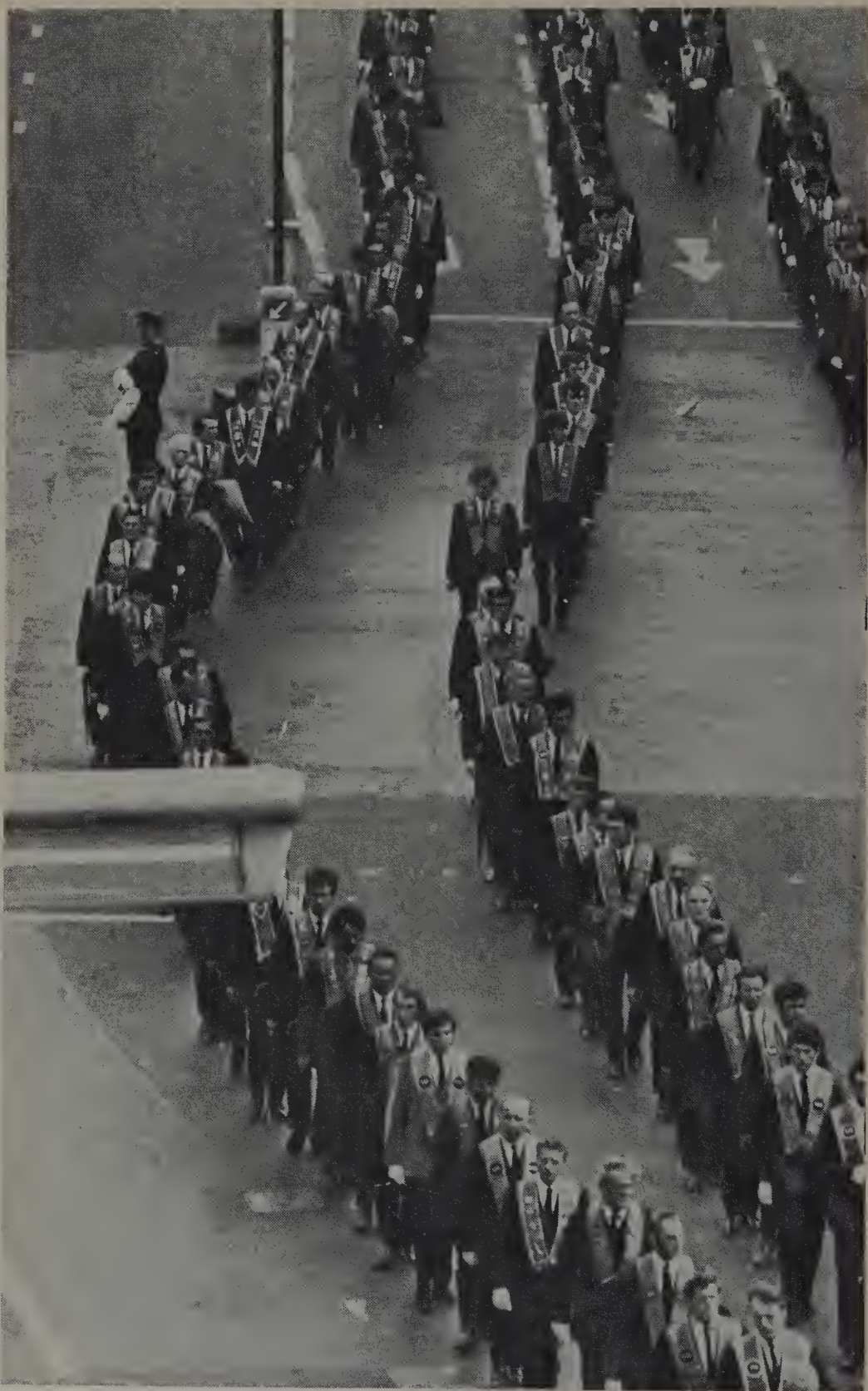
The IRA offensive continued through the autumn and early winter with no let-up. By the end of 1971 the total number of British officers and men killed in the North had mounted sharply to forty-six, many of them from the crack, highly trained regiments like the Scots Guards, Dragoons and Lancers. In October alone that year almost one hundred were wounded. The official British fatalities included a trooper whose death was attributed to a shooting accident



A demonstrator "squares up" to a member of the riot police in Derry, April 1969. (*Syndication International*)



Scene during the "Battle of the Bogside" in August 1969. An angry mob, armed with petrol bombs, faced the masked members of the special police gas-squad across a missile-littered "no man's land." (*Syndication International*)



Protestant Orange Day Marchers in Belfast on Monday 13 July 1970. An outbreak of violence was feared and eleven thousand British troops stood by, to prevent trouble. Although the march passed peacefully, on 23 July all marches were banned for the next six months. (*Popperfoto*)



Hooded members of the Irish Republican Club, at New Lodge Road, Belfast, burn 200 census forms as part of the civil rights campaign. (*Press Association*)



The aftermath of sectarian violence in Belfast. The damaged houses in the foreground are in Bombay Street – a Catholic area. In the background are undamaged Protestant houses. (*Syndication International*)



Troops stand guard in an ordinary residential street — a common sight in Belfast during 1972. (*Keystone Press*)



A British gunner patrols the M.1. Motorway, which links Belfast and Dublin. Helicopters were used to spot landmines laid by the IRA and later one was hijacked and used to snatch Séamus Twomey from prison. (*Keystone Press*)

at Long Kesh camp. They did not include five UDR members and eleven RUC men killed. The British public were beginning to change their view as the fierce, sustained resistance forced military casualties steadily upwards. By late September a national poll by the *Daily Mail* showed that *fifty-nine* per cent now wanted their troops to be brought home from Ireland.

We could feel the tide starting to turn. Freedom must always seem out of reach in the early stages of a revolutionary struggle, but after only a few months of open resistance, the IRA and the Nationalist people had made this corrupt political system unworkable and the police state itself ungovernable.

The level of British army activity against the civilian population can be gauged from figures given in parliament in mid-November by Geoffrey Johnson Smith, the junior minister for the army. He admitted that the military had searched almost 2,500 homes in the previous four weeks and that over four hundred people had been arrested. What these cold statistics meant was that every day in the Nationalist districts eighty or ninety front doors would be hammered with rifle butts, or quite often smashed in. Troops would pour in, inform the occupants that their home was being "searched" under the Special Powers Act, and then proceed to reduce it to chaos. Personal belongings were damaged or destroyed. Household effects, furniture and fittings were ruined. The picture of the Sacred Heart usually seen in Catholic homes in Ireland would frequently be knocked off the wall during the search. In some cases occupants reported money and valuables missing afterwards.

In one instance a large party of troops in a country district arrived at the home of a Republican who was absent. They were accompanied by an RUC man. The people in the house were subjected to personal abuse while carpets and floorboards were ripped up and the skirting around the walls taken out. The kitchen door was knocked off its hinges. The ceilings were damaged and so was some of the furniture. By the time the troops finished, having found absolutely nothing, the house was a shambles. A junior officer came in, looked around and told the soldiers to clean up the place. A sergeant detailed two men while the rest left. One of the soldiers asked the occupants if he could have a broom. When they got him one, he deliberately leaned on the broom handle until it broke.

"Sorry," the soldier said, grinning. "We can't clean up now. We've got no broom." The sergeant withdrew, leaving the place as it was.

That family had to wait over a year before their claim for damages was attended to, and even then they received nothing like the cost of the destruction the troops had caused.

In contrast, in another case I know of in Belfast, the house was scrupulously searched. Everything taken out was replaced, and there was no bad language or abuse. When the search was over, the officer in charge asked the householder if he had any complaints. The man said he had no complaints about the manner in which it had been conducted, but he objected to the search itself in principle. When he was asked to sign the usual document, he added a note to this effect. The officer went out with the document, followed by the search party. As an NCO passed the householder, he suddenly struck him a vicious blow in the stomach with his rifle butt, and as a parting gesture knocked over the hall table and damaged it. When the man reported this behaviour, he was simply shown the no-complaint form he had signed, and the authorities refused to entertain his protest.

By this time, thousands of homes in the North had been searched, some of them on thirty different occasions. During periods of particular pressure on certain districts, the same home would be searched daily for a week, and even three or four times a day. Outside in the street, it was no better. Morning searches of pedestrians and vehicles made people late for work, as the troops well knew. But any protest would bring abuse and rough handling. The person's feet would be kicked wider apart as he faced the wall, covered by one soldier with an SLR while another searched him.

During the day, foot patrols moved up and down continuously in the Nationalist districts, walking all over little gardens, peering through windows. Military lorries would arrive, and more troops would jump out, hurriedly erecting checkpoints. Passers-by would be stopped and spot-searched against the walls, with the usual jeers. At night commando-style "duck squads" with blackened faces would prowl through housing estates, lanes and alleyways. Lone men and drunks coming home late fared badly if they encountered these squads. They were often beaten up and left lying unconscious until somebody found them. The heavy Saracens and the armoured troop carriers known as "pigs" would roar around the Nationalist estates late at night, dragging tin cans behind them while the soldiers shouted at the top of their voices. The purpose of these tactics was to upset the residents with intermittent false alarms, in the hope that they would take less notice of the genuine alarms when the military

arrived on raids. It was also the soldiers' way of getting their own back for the effective methods by which the local people warned their neighbours that raiders were coming.

This nerve-wracking harassment of the Nationalist districts contrasted very sharply with the usual behaviour of British troops in Loyalist areas, where uniformed and organised groups of the Ulster Defence Association openly brandished firearms as they stopped and searched cars at their own barricades. The UDA, a mixture of various Loyalist extremist bodies and former B-specials, had emerged as a rival to the UVF after the fighting in internment week. Apart from the almost automatic brutality of the Parachute Regiment which caused bad relations in the Shankill Road, however, the Loyalist areas never suffered the pressure and provocation that the military kept up in the Nationalist districts.

Today, the efforts of the British counter-insurgency advisers and the politicians of London, Belfast and Dublin are still urgently directed at the problem of getting the population to reject the guerrillas. Why have the British not succeeded in achieving this, in spite of the enormous pressures they exercised on the Nationalist people? Counter-insurgency techniques and theories developed in previous colonial situations have not brought the desired results in the North. After all the suffering and coercion, the fish still swim in the water. It is obvious that the British made a bad analysis of that population, and they did not seem to pay attention to one very important fact.

The experience of Kitson and many other British counter-insurgency experts was formed in Africa, the Far East and the Middle East. They studied and exchanged ideas with their American opposite numbers, whose counter-insurgency experience was formed in Vietnam and other parts of the Far East. In all these places women had often played a significant part in the struggles, but the strategists failed to appreciate this (particularly in the British army) because they came from societies in which women's contributions are usually underrated. In the North of Ireland, however, the women of the Nationalist areas showed a spirit of defiance that had to be seen to be believed. That was why the colonial-type pressures failed to crack the population.

The women were completely undefeatable. They were the first to give the warnings, the first out on the streets to face the oncoming troops. I say without hesitation that it is due to this determined

spirit of resistance by the Nationalist women of Ulster that the campaign has gone on for so long. I have personal experience of a number of cases in which the widows of IRA volunteers killed in action asked that they themselves be allowed to become active members of the Republican movement as soon as possible.

On a Saturday night at the end of October two women activists were shot dead by the British in the Lower Falls. Dorothy Maguire and Máire Meehan, though members of the Women's Action Committee, were never combatants in any military sense. They were passengers in a car when soldiers suddenly opened fire on it. The British army immediately put out the same story as in the case of the killing of Harry Thornton. They said they had been fired on from the car, and claimed that the two women had been dressed in men's military-type uniforms. But there were too many witnesses. People by now had learned to get as much detailed proof on the spot as possible, and photographs were taken of the interior of the car with the bodies of Dorothy and Máire still in it. The manner of the women's deaths shocked and grieved me, because Dorothy Maguire had called to see me a few months previously on a visit to Dublin, and I had met Máire Meehan in Belfast. After the shooting, the British beat up and systematically persecuted her husband for months in revenge for the way their story had been proved false.

This double killing played a considerable part in making Republican women more militant still. The trend eventually developed into a new feature of revolutionary war in Ireland — the participation in combat of women volunteers. In previous phases of the national struggle, from the beginning of the century on, Irish women had been prominent as organisers. It was a woman, the remarkable Constance Markievicz, who founded Fianna Eireann, the Republican youth movement (and incidentally was the first woman to be elected to the British parliament though she never took her seat). In periods of fighting, they had given courageous service in intelligence, liaison, courier work and the transport of war materials, but not in actual combat.

However, in the early 'seventies, a selected number of suitable women were taken into the IRA and trained. Some of the best shots I ever knew were women. So were the smartest intelligence officers in Belfast. From that time onwards women were admitted to the IRA on a basis of full equality with men, as in the Israeli, Chinese and certain other armed forces. In support roles, the Women's Action

Committee were the very effective organisers of demonstrations, early warning networks and the simple but unfailing bin-lid alarms, which were the bush telegraph of the Nationalist areas. The approach of danger was signalled ahead from street to street by banging the dustbin lids, a noise that never ceased to needle the Brits. If they found a walkie-talkie while searching a house, the owner was for it. But they knew they couldn't arrest anyone for possession of a dustbin, which could be heard nearly as far and wasn't vulnerable to the British radio jammers.

One of the stock British propaganda stories that turned up every couple of months was that the IRA had lost so many men that it was being forced to use women and children fighters. The people who wrote them didn't know about life in the Nationalist areas, where entire families have been involved in continuous resistance for almost six years.

Faulkner and his government kept quoting statistics, claiming that "the Provisionals are on the run." Faulkner was made to look foolish on the weekend of November 27–28 when the IRA carried out a co-ordinated wave of almost a hundred operations throughout the North. More than sixty of them took place on the first day, Saturday. All the border customs huts, which by and large had been left alone up to then, were burned or blown up that morning. Through the weekend there were dozens of bombing operations and numerous incendiary incidents, coupled with anti-personnel attacks against British forces. The Provisional IRA claimed responsibility. One of the Northern right-wingers said he wished that Faulkner would keep his big mouth shut in future. Soon Maudling was no longer talking as though the IRA were about to be wiped out, and made his famous remark predicting that the movement would not be completely eliminated but that violence would be "reduced to an acceptable level." All that General Tuzo was now willing to say was that he was "quietly confident" of defeating the IRA. As usual, it was the politicians who had been doing most of the strong-man talk about security. The military were no longer fooling themselves about the competence of the guerrillas.

With the success of the bombing campaign, at the end of November the Republican leadership took a general decision to observe a Christmas truce if one could be arranged. Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and I received an invitation to meet the Catholic Archbishop of Dublin, the late Dr McQuaid, to discuss the possibility of such a

truce. It was with great pleasure that I was able to tell him that this had already been decided upon. We had a brief and friendly conversation with him, and left him some literature outlining the Republican social and economic programme. What I particularly appreciated was that he had gone privately about proposing the truce instead of exploiting the situation by calling for it in the media first, the usual tactic of certain other churchmen who won more publicity than concrete results.

A three-day truce was observed from December 24, but Faulkner's Christmas message to the people was a spiteful one. He gave a guarantee that there would be no let-up whatsoever in the drive to combat the IRA.

I had a Christmas present that year which delighted me. Martin Meehan and two other prisoners escaped from Crumlin Road jail in December. Martin was one of the people in the movement I was especially fond of, and I had tremendous respect for him. At the time of his arrest other Ardoyne men had also been arrested. They and Martin were brutally tortured in an effort to get information out of them. The British used long needles which were pushed into his hands to scrape the bone, causing the most intense pain. Strangely enough, he did not seem bitter about this when he described it afterwards. Early in December, Martin and two other lads escaped from Crumlin Road. The prison authorities were not even aware they were missing until a newspaperman rang up asking them to confirm that Martin Meehan and two others had escaped. He had got the tip from appropriate quarters.

It was the second break in just over a fortnight. Nine Republicans had already made a mass escape in a neat operation mounted from outside the prison during a football match. We held very successful press conferences in the South for Martin and the others, at which we were able to publish *Torture*, a fully documented dossier of the interrogation experiences of arrested men. But my pleasure in seeing Martin at liberty again was to be offset at the close of the year by the death of another great Republican soldier, Jack McCabe.

The manner of Jack's death, however, throws light on another and more sinister tragedy. He had been engaged in mixing explosives when the accident occurred. At that time supplies of explosives to carry on the sabotage campaign in the North were short. Gelignite and other industrial explosives had become extremely difficult to obtain, and were heavily guarded both North and South. British

intelligence was doing its utmost to trace and shut off supplies from abroad. The IRA engineers worked hard all that autumn to develop alternative explosives. They were making fast progress in anti-handling devices which made it impossible to defuse certain bombs without setting them off. A captain in the Royal Army Ordnance Corps was killed in Antrim in September, and a warrant officer in Lurgan in November. Late in October, British army engineers who succeeded in rendering one device safe after a six-hour effort in Belfast admitted that it was the most sophisticated bomb which the British had yet come across in the North. During the development stage, however, there were problems of stability and safety to be overcome.

These problems had not been solved, and accordingly explosives were still available only in a very narrow range of types, when the notorious bombing of McGurk's Bar in North Queen Street in Belfast took place on December 4, killing fifteen people. McGurk's was a Catholic pub, but attempts were immediately made to attribute the bombing to the Provisional IRA. Shooting broke out afterwards and six people were injured, including a British soldier who died the following week.

I was in the West of Ireland that Saturday night. On hearing news of this bombing, I was able to make a quick personal checkout. I telephoned the newspapers myself, on behalf of the leadership, making it quite clear that the IRA had not been involved and emphasising our condemnation. The next version of the incident that then took root was that the bomb had been brought to McGurk's for collection for an operation elsewhere, but this was equally untrue.

There was no possibility that such an operation could be mounted by any Republican unit in Belfast without staff knowledge and proper clearance. A thorough inquiry accounted for every volunteer and every stick or pound of explosive in Republican control in Belfast that night. But other inquiries pointed in an altogether different direction — to the British.

The explosion had been of tremendous power, because the entire building was totally destroyed and rescue teams were digging people out of the rubble all night. Yet the bomb itself had been small enough for a man to carry, and witnesses had seen someone get out of a car and leave something by the door. The only kind of explosive capable of producing such an effect in such small amounts was a military one. Plastic explosive had been used. The IRA has never

used plastic. It cannot be obtained except from military sources, and Protestant extremist organisations do not have access to it either, even in the event that they would sanction such a deed. The following Saturday another unaccountable explosion wrecked a furniture shop on the Shankill Road, this time killing four people, including two children. Some days later, it was the turn of a Catholic pub again, this time with one person killed.

I believe then, and I believe now, that British undercover elements were trying to bring about a limited sectarian confrontation in Belfast to serve British policy ends. Militarily, such a confrontation would draw out the Belfast IRA, enabling the British to engage them in strength and bring them to battle. Open defensive fighting is the least advantageous condition for urban guerrillas. Psychologically, the British army, which had suffered heavily in esteem through the media disclosures about torture methods, would be repopularised in British domestic eyes as “our boys” keeping the warring Irish sects apart once more.

There was one more hint that a sophisticated London mentality was at work. On the day after the destruction of McGurk’s, responsibility for the explosion was claimed by a group describing themselves as the “Empire Loyalists.” Now, as a former Londoner, I have always kept my eye to events in that city. The League of Empire Loyalists had been responsible for some crack-brained demonstrations and threats of action over there, and they might well suggest themselves as scapegoats to the mind of someone who had recently been in England. But in Belfast they meant nothing at all. Whoever used that deception knew more about matters in England than in the North.

During the few days I was able to spend at home during the Christmas truce, I tried to find means to prevent further exploitation of the sectarian danger. Why should there not be a general conference, wholly Irish in character, of delegates from all organisations involved in the Northern situation to seek a solution to our country’s problems?

I sounded out various people, who all liked the idea. Before the end of 1971 I discussed it with Protestants from the North. They included a minister who had asked to meet me. He told me that a number of Protestants from various parts of the North, some of them clerics and some of them laymen, would like a meeting with me and other leading Republicans. He too approved of the idea of such a

conference. I was very heartened indeed, and immediately agreed to get in touch with my colleagues and bring them with me to meet him and his Protestant associates.

In the second week of the new year I, Séamus Twomey and another Belfast man who is now in Long Kesh met these good people and spent five hours with them in very frank discussion. They were reassured by our ideas on what we understood by civil and religious liberty. I expounded my idea about an Irish Conference. They told us they all knew many Protestants who accepted the inevitability of a united Ireland. Some of them agreed with us that a British declaration of intent for unification was of paramount importance. I am still convinced that such a conference, held in the right atmosphere and under the right conditions, could produce an *Irish* solution which Britain would then have no alternative but to accept.

That way, we would at last be at peace with each other, and at peace with her. But while Britain is involved in the search for a solution to Ireland's problems, she will obviously put her own interests first.

Before 1972 was much older, the world learned to its horror that it was not at the conference table that the British would first try to end the Northern conflict.

Chapter 14

Bloody Sunday and After

I was nearly killed on January 30, 1972, the day that was to become known as Bloody Sunday. Some hours before the events which gave the day its name, I was driving towards Dundalk for a meeting on the border. Suddenly my car skidded off the road, mounted a bank and somersaulted. I had not been travelling at very high speed, because of bad road conditions. I found myself upside down, but managed to get a door open and roll out. I stood up and gingerly felt my head and ribs. I discovered that I had not a scratch, though my hair was full of broken glass.

Giving thanks for my escape, I shook the splinters out as best I could and set out to walk. I soon got a lift which took me into Dundalk, where I arranged to have the car picked up, and then went on to keep my rendezvous, shaken but otherwise all right. It was late in the afternoon when the first terrible news reached us from Derry.

On Christmas Day a thousand people had defied the ban on parades and marched along the M1 motorway in Belfast to protest against the continuation of internment. There had been no trouble on the route, but Faulkner was furious. During January the British army were given the go-ahead to break up similar protests. Troops of the Parachute Regiment used considerable violence on people who gathered on Magilligan Sands to demonstrate against the reopening of the military base there as a second concentration camp. They clubbed the protesters, who included wives and relatives of transferred internees, and rubber bullets were fired at point-blank range at men and women alike. That was the situation when the Civil Rights Association organised another big anti-internment march in Derry that Sunday, January 30.

The Provisional IRA was instructed to keep away from this march. When the first reports came in that the British had opened fire in Derry and killed several people, I started telephoning our own and other information sources. On learning the full extent of the casualties, I went cold. Thirteen dead. Another person died later from his wounds. All were civilians.

Their deaths were the inevitable consequence of giving the British military establishment a say in determining political objectives for the North. As a result, the British were forced to resort to the most desperate propaganda effort in the vain hope of explaining away an act of military repression against the civil population many times more barbarous than any reported from Czechoslovakia under the Soviet occupation in 1968. Nobody who saw it is ever likely to forget the terrible television picture of the grey-faced priest making his way towards the British paratroopers in Derry that Sunday, waving his handkerchief and imploring them to stop firing. That was the reality. The British claimed that the paratroopers were fired on when they arrived at the edge of the Bogside. Untrue. They claimed that several of the men and boys they shot down were on the wanted list. Untrue. They claimed that one man had several nail bombs. Untrue. They claimed that the paratroopers had fired in self-defence or in support of others under attack. Untrue. Nobody was shot down that day but unarmed civilians.

Military guidance on the highest level was present on the ground in Derry on the afternoon of January 30. The troops involved, the First Battalion of the Parachute Regiment, had been specially sent to Derry that day. This unit had a particular reputation for aggressiveness and harsh treatment of the civilian population, both in Nationalist and Loyalist areas. It is a highly trained and highly disciplined force. Elite shock troops like these do not lose their heads, act against orders, fire wildly or mistake unarmed civilians for hostile riflemen at a few yards' range. The possibility that they would do any of these things *in the presence of their own CO and a general officer* could only be entertained by people totally ignorant of the command and communications system of the British professional military machine in the 1970s. The main theme in British propaganda about Bloody Sunday was that this unit opened fire *in reaction* to a situation which it encountered. But soldiers and military correspondents know that when shock troops are brought in for an operation, it is an assault operation in which they will take the initiative.

The paratroops came to the edge of the Bogside as they were meant to. They took up the positions they were ordered to take up. They selected the targets they were ordered to select. If they had been told to fire in the air or over the heads of the civilians, they would have done so. But they understood their fire orders perfectly. They shot to kill. There was no mistake, nor could there have been. "I was forward with my troops and my company commanders and my sergeants and my platoon commanders," said their battalion commander Lieutenant-Colonel Derek Wilford on BBC. There was tactical control all the way, right back to Major-General Ford standing a short distance away in William Street.

A chain of misjudgments underlay British strategy. By January 1972, Faulkner was relying totally on the British army to keep him in power, and Heath was hoping it would. But Faulkner knew very little about armies, and Heath knew very little about Ireland. When it came down to the practical matter of how the army was to accomplish this, it was inevitable that opinions offered by the British military establishment would be increasingly influential on both prime ministers. Instead of military thinking being used in support of political objectives, it had ceased to be a separate consideration. By January the British had obviously obtained clearance for a hammer-blow in which the military themselves would attempt to force a political solution.

The aim was to bring about a spectacular defeat of the IRA which would destroy the morale of the no-go areas, enable Stormont to reassert its rule and leave the Nationalist people with no option but to accept whatever reforms the Loyalist right wing would let Faulkner get away with. To accomplish this, the IRA would have to be brought to battle in a situation that would be least advantageous for guerrillas and would offer the conventional army scope to exploit its superior numbers and equipment.

The British had learned that the only times the IRA would concentrate and emerge in open battle were for community defence. In Belfast, the logical move for the British was to draw them into battle with the Loyalist extremists. That was the reason for the mysterious provocations with their clear evidence of British thinking and war materials. Once a large-scale sectarian confrontation were produced, the British would use the greatly expanded Ulster Defence Regiment to seal the Belfast perimeter. They would then throw an inner ring of men and armour around the areas where the IRA were concentrated and close in, with the armed Loyalists backing, flanking

and sniping. This would produce the magnificent last stand of the Belfast IRA, or so the British apparently hoped. But the Belfast provocations had not brought the desired results. After the heavy street fighting in internment week, the Loyalist extremists showed no eagerness to attack Nationalist districts in force again. The undercover provocations certainly did stir up sectarian reaction, but principally in the form of further bombings and assassinations. From the military point of view, the British had far more to gain from these sectarian confrontations than the Loyalists had.

Derry was a different proposition. Free Derry, with its barricades and vigilante system, was not hemmed in. It was not vulnerable to car teams of "black" operators who sped in and out, or to pseudo-sectarian bombings or other undercover provocations. The Nationalist population in Derry was in the majority. An attempt to bring the Derry IRA to battle would have been an *open* provocation.

The British army manual of land operations devotes an entire volume to "counter revolutionary operations." Although this was produced a few weeks after the Belfast fighting in August 1969, basic tactics in this field go back a great number of years. Most of the manual was not applicable to circumstances in Derry, but a historically tested counter-revolutionary tactic is to brutalise the civilian population so as to trigger the revolutionaries into a suicidal open confrontation.

The civil rights anti-internment march provided such an opportunity. The occupation authorities had time to plan it. The date was known in advance. The marchers would be defying the ban on parades, which would provide the British with a pretext for the use of maximum force. When this force was applied, it was expected that the IRA would be drawn out and obliged to react in strength. Then the paratroopers would go in to smash the resistance in the Bogside. When the mopping-up was completed, that would be the end of the IRA problem in Derry. Demoralised no-go areas in Belfast would then be dealt with. The Nationalist resistance would collapse, and the situation would be sufficiently "stabilised" for Faulkner to carry on.

It must have looked a highly promising plan both at British staff level and to the politicians. But it did not work because of a British intelligence failure. Despite all their tactical planning, the importation of the parachute battalion and the presence of Major-General Ford in person, the British failed to grasp one important fact that might have caused them to defer the entire operation. The civil rights

organisers had expressly asked the IRA to keep away from the march that Sunday.

This request, for the safety of the marchers themselves, was an earnest one, and it had to be complied with. The reason there were no IRA casualties that afternoon was simple. The IRA was not there.

Some of the marchers went on until they were confronted by a British military barricade in William Street. There was a bit of a scuffle, and gas and rubber bullets were fired. But the rest of the march had turned off at right angles down Rossville Street towards the Bogside. They were following the lorry carrying the civil rights speakers to Free Derry Corner, where the day's proceedings were to wind up with an open-air meeting.

Now, if the British objective had been merely to break up the march and arrest some of those taking part, they could have mounted a containment operation while the marchers were still in William Street. But that area was already clear when the paratroopers were ordered forward. Their armoured personnel carriers moved down to the high-rise Rossville flats *after* the people. By this time, many had gathered for the meeting at Free Derry Corner. A lot more, who felt that the speakers were preaching to the converted, had started home to the Bogside and Creggan for their tea rather than stand around in the January wind. When the paratroopers jumped out of the APCs and opened fire, nobody knew what was happening.

Some of the paratroopers had their faces blackened or wore gas masks. A British press photographer who tried to take pictures of them said afterwards, giving evidence of his own treatment, that he was struck in the groin and thrown to the ground. He heard no shots until the paratrooper next to him opened fire.

The exact words of Major-General Ford that afternoon were, "My information at the moment, almost immediately after the incident, is that the para battalion fired three rounds altogether."

The British SLR has a characteristic report, and is even more unmistakable in rapid fire, compared with any of the older, lighter or low-velocity weapons then in use in the North. It was not plausible that a two-star general, only a short distance from the killing ground, should need "information" to recognise the sound of the British army's basic infantry rifle. Not only did Ford insult people's intelligence with this rubbish, but he was promptly caught out. An ITV producer who had been standing near him in William Street

testified that, in fact, he had already heard Ford say, "That's awful heavy fire."

And indeed it was. The real density of the British fire is easily established from the various recordings broadcast and monitored that day. In one of these recordings, no fewer than eleven SLR shots are clearly identifiable *inside fifteen seconds*. This merely indicates the volume of the fire, not its duration. The paratroopers continued firing and clubbing people to the ground as they advanced in pairs across the open ground from the Rossville flats and penetrated into the edges of the Bogside. Several people were shot at close range. Others who had been lying flat and taking cover got up and tried to run back as the paratroopers approached; they were killed by bullets in the back before they reached safety at the barricades.

Lieutenant-Colonel Wilford's attitude to this was as fantastic as Major-General Ford's. "I don't believe they were shot in the back running away," he said. "A lot of us in fact do think that some of their people were shot by their own indiscriminate firing." This was the same officer who had admitted that he had been forward with his company and platoon commanders observing the attack. "We went in to make arrests," he stated, "and that's all we went in for. They were the orders and they were quite clear."

But a British battalion commander in the North in 1972 did not require orders from higher up just to make arrests. Private soldiers were doing it all the time, as the persecuted people were only too well aware. If special orders coming down to a lieutenant-colonel were needed, it was a special operation.

"The operation was authorised by British Ministers in knowledge of the risks of civilian casualties," the *Sunday Times* said flatly. It described the objective as a mass scoop-up of IRA personnel in Derry. But that was only trying to gloss the issue. In such an operation, the prospect of civilian casualties was not just a risk. It was a certainty. And Heath's government had approved it.

Three British reporters took cover in a Catholic church when they saw the paras running in towards them. One of them had experienced the paras' behaviour at Magilligan Sands the previous Sunday. As the three of them went up the church steps they were fired on by "a short man in a brown coat" positioned behind a corner of the church wall with what appeared to be a .22 rifle. Women and girls sheltering inside told them, "He is shooting at anyone who comes out of the church." The girls thought he was from the Loyalist Fountain area.

But was he? A lone Loyalist freelance with a light little weapon like that would be taking a foolhardy risk there at the best of times. Apart from being spotted by Bogside's, he would be inviting attention from several British lookout posts that kept the area under constant surveillance. Why had he taken up position *before* the British attack came in? And why did he continue to fire on people as the paratroopers approached? Whoever he was, he obviously had no worries about revealing his position to them. This would have been plain suicide — unless he had a prearranged part to play in the operation. The man in the brown coat undoubtedly fired shots that day which the British claimed they were “returning” when they opened fire into the crowd of civilians.

Not only that, but his targets were deliberately sectarian. People fired on in the Catholic church attributed his shots to a Protestant sniper. This episode at the church had the stamp of a secondary provocation, synchronised with the main one. The reader may consider whether an outbreak of sectarian rioting would have helped or hindered the British operation. Loyalist crowds would have descended on the Bogside behind the troops. If the IRA had responded according to calculations, far higher civilian casualties would have resulted. The first fourteen killings would have been lumped into the general figures. In line with usual practice, the dead would have been reported as rioters, IRA members, IRA targets or victims of “crossfire.” It would all have been attributed to the defiance of the marching ban by the civil rights organisers. And once again the world would have been told how British troops had heroically kept the Irish apart and scored a crushing victory over the IRA.

The man in the brown coat was the only armed civilian seen until some NLF men and others arrived from the Creggan, to no useful purpose. By then, the British operation had practically fizzled out. Phase one, the brutalisation of the civilian population, had been completed. But phase two, the revolutionary response, had not developed. The guerrillas had no intention of pouring out of Free Derry to accept battle with a conventional army in conditions of the enemy's choosing, even though the provocation could not have been stronger or closer.

An operation entailing ministerial clearance and a general officer's presence on the ground naturally included due provision for the propaganda and psychological warfare elements. The duty officers of

the British information machine were able to go into action immediately. It took an immense amount of nerve to adopt the course they did, but they selected it and stuck to it as long as they could. It was based on one simple principle. No matter who had been in Derry that day — international press, radio, television, MPs, clergymen, doctors, lawyers or anybody else — if they disputed what the British military said, they were liars, every single one of them. Even the most experienced war reporters were shaken by this policy, and their astonishment was clear to millions that night on television.

The target of the propaganda attack was the dead themselves. The unarmed civilians were ruthlessly described as riflemen and nail bombers who had got what was coming to them. The consequences of this policy were very serious in Ireland, where it has never paid to malign the dead. It intensified the anger and bitterness many times over.

The outcome was felt in Ireland over the next two days. Early on Sunday evening I and other Republican leaders had called for a day of national mourning. In Dublin Lynch was waiting to test the feedback that night before he ventured any move himself. The following day, when the rising mood of the public in the South was unmistakable, Lynch judged it safe to announce an official day of national mourning. The Irish ambassador was recalled from London, and Lynch said that the Dáil would now vote finance for all movements “working peacefully” to free the North from Unionism.

That Monday there were spontaneous demonstrations all over the country, particularly in Dublin. It was their lack of political character that was their strongest feature. They were popular, basic protests on a scale that nobody could remember in modern times. Workers just came out of the factories, downed tools on building sites and marched to the British embassy. The embassy became the focal point for the mass resentment. Demonstrators made several attacks trying to reach it, to be driven back by a cordon of Gardai in baton charges. When word of this spread through the city, the crowds around the embassy grew larger still.

When I made my way down to Marrión Square with a friend on Wednesday, the embassy was burning. Gardai were now standing with their hands behind their backs, watching the flames. I studied the expressions on their faces. They were no different from those of the rest of the people. Lynch let the building burn, and the massive wave of emotion with it. It was better for Fianna Fáil to

have all the anger concentrated on one symbol instead of serious anti-British rioting all over the place. It was a lot cheaper, too. After the usual diplomatic exchanges, London would be compensated for the embassy out of the people's money. When the British ambassador, Sir John Peck, retired later he admitted that Anglo-Irish relations that week were at their lowest point for half a century.

The effects on Irish people living abroad were intense too. Scores were arrested in a Bloody Sunday protest in London. Many Irish men and women returned in disgust from Britain. Irishmen who had fought for England against fascism returned their war medals, including a peer who had commanded a Fleet Air Arm unit.

On Tuesday, February 1, Heath announced that an official inquiry into the events at Derry had been ordered. This prevented media from publishing results of their own investigations under the *sub judice* restrictions. The Brits knew how to go about the psychological warfare business. Luckily for us, they kept doing it wrong, because they never really understood that tactics which worked well on the English often had exactly the opposite effect on the Irish temperament.

The inquiry was conducted by Lord Widgery, the Lord Chief Justice of England. He had been a senior army officer himself. When the findings of his inquiry were announced, the most they had to say about the behaviour of the paratroopers that Sunday was that in some cases it had bordered on recklessness. This was received with smug satisfaction in England, where the attitude of the population was a foregone conclusion. But it did the British no good at all in Ireland, where it stimulated further anti-British feeling. Who could possibly gain from that but the Republican movement?

No disciplinary action was ever taken against the officers and men involved in the killings. Indeed, Lieutenant-Colonel Wilford was decorated for his services in the North. That gesture to the paras' CO showed Northerners where they really stood with the Crown that claimed them as "subjects."

The inquests on the Derry victims were delayed until the following year, but that tactic did not benefit the British much. When they were finally held, the coroner promptly described the mass shootings as sheer, unadulterated murder. This set off an enraged controversy, with furious protests from Unionist politicians.

Bloody Sunday caused more anger in Ireland than any act of British military policy since 1921. It forced Heath to stop relying on

the advice of the generals and search frantically for a political solution. It destroyed Faulkner's hopes of clinging to power. It made direct rule inevitable. And it created a new spirit of resistance, colder, harder and more determined.

The period immediately following Bloody Sunday was one of intense military activity. By evading the British attempt to trap it in massed combat, the IRA remained intact. Now it carried the fight to the British by sound guerrilla methods. A major of the Green Jackets died that same day, one of Kitson's old regiment. In the next eight or nine days almost three hundred IRA operations were carried out. By mid-February another five British soldiers had been killed, and dozens wounded.

We got a bonus. Francie McGuigan walked out of Long Kesh in disguise and came back to us, the first man to escape from the concentration camp. His escape was a great booster for morale, and the public who supported us North and South enjoyed it as much as we did. We gave an enormously successful press conference at which we were able to produce the group of Republicans who had escaped from the prison ship *Maidstone* in Belfast Lough and were promptly dubbed "the Magnificent Seven."

It was around this period that indirect feelers on behalf of the British government began to reach us. It was desired to establish the minimum terms which the Republican leadership would accept for a cessation of hostilities.

We had issued five-point terms the previous September, but the leadership kept the whole question under review in relation to the prevailing situation. Now, at the beginning of March 1972, we announced revised terms:

1. Withdrawal of British troops in the North from the streets to barracks as a prelude to eventual evacuation, coupled with an acknowledgement by the British government of the right of the Irish people to determine their future without interference by that government.
2. Abolition of Stormont.
3. A total amnesty for political prisoners.

We felt that the remaining points in our September terms could now best be dealt with by negotiation once the major points had been overcome.

We knew very well why these feelers were being extended. Britain could not sustain colonial repression at the level of Bloody Sunday without turning world opinion against her. Nixon's America, still involved in Vietnam, was not in the best position to preach to London about repression. But the almost hysterical attacks on Senator Edward Kennedy in British quarters showed how sensitive they were to transatlantic opinion all the same. He had spoken in Congress in October supporting a resolution calling for the withdrawal of British troops and the immediate convening of all parties involved "for the purpose of establishing a united Ireland." Senator Kennedy answered his critics in a letter to *The Times*. He pointed out that the passionate protests about his speech were caused by Britain's guilty conscience over the North. Now, in a St Patrick's Day message, he repeated his proposals.

Inspired press leaks from Westminster and private intelligence of our own combined to give us the picture of the political "initiative" Heath might have in mind. In line with the classic British colonial game, we were informed, the Nationalists and the Loyalists were to be told that these proposals "may well offer the last chance of averting a civil war" that would engulf North and South. Heath was still trying to solve the Irish problem by blackmail methods fifty years old. "Which do you want? My package of compromise or civil war?"

While we waited to see whether he would improve on the actual package when he got the feedback from the press leaks, the existing war went on. On March 2 a young resistance fighter, Albert Kavanagh, was captured unarmed on a sabotage operation. After he surrendered the police shot him dead. A week later four other volunteers were killed in an explosion in a house in Clonard Street in Belfast. The British used an electronic device to "sweep" the area on certain wavelengths. This activated the bombs which were in the house. After a while, the British discovered there were risks for themselves in using this kind of equipment. IRA technicians were able to "home" the signals back on simple transistor equipment, and surprised British patrols were pinpointed and shot up before they knew where they were.

In Derry another fatal incident brought me great sadness. Seán Keenan is one of the Republicans I admire best. His son Colm and another volunteer were shot dead by British troops.

Despite the tight British surveillance of Derry, I was determined I would get into Derry somehow for Colm Keenan's funeral. Seán himself was interned in Long Kesh, but I believed that he would be let out to bury his son. Not only would I be able to pay my last respects in person to these two young volunteers, but I would have a chance to see Seán and talk to him.

I left for the North with Martin Meehan. We drove to the Donegal-Derry border, where we made contact with the Derry leadership. Word came out that there was intensive roadblock activity between the border and Derry city. Their advice was that we would not get in without running into trouble. But I had made up my mind that I was going in. I asked Derry for a guide to get us in on foot over the hills.

The guide eventually arrived. He led us up a narrow country lane and over a cratered road. Immediately we were across the border we took to the fields. Suddenly we heard the familiar sound of a British motorised patrol. In the border areas these usually consisted of two armoured cars and a personnel carrier. We stopped, then, and very slowly eased ourselves flat to the ground.

We could not see the Brits from where we were. But we heard the grinding of the patrol coming to a halt, then the clanging of armoured doors, the sound of their voices and a good deal of moving about. If they were going to stay around for any length of time, they would more than likely send a couple of men up to the high ground with a GP machine-gun to cover them. In such a situation, there is an overpowering temptation to try to move into a better position and make a visual check on what the enemy is doing. But Martin and I knew that the best thing was not to make the slightest movement and continue to rely on our ears. We only hoped the guide did too.

After a while we heard them getting in again, and the patrol moved off down the road.

We changed direction now, moving across the countryside parallel to the road, but keeping well back. We had to cross two roads. We went very cautiously across the first. Just as we came to the second road, we heard once more the sound of a motorised patrol approaching. We took cover, and it passed. Having reconnoitred the second road, we crossed it swiftly and noiselessly. Below were the spires and the walls of the old city, and we finally made our way down the windswept Creggan heights into the safety and solidarity of Free Derry.

We came to the big Creggan estate, and Seán Keenan was there. I offered him the condolences of the whole movement on Colm's death.

"I mourn the loss of my son," he said, "but I don't begrudge his life for Ireland." Seán himself had known almost twelve years of imprisonment, his wife and sons had suffered imprisonment too, and now one of his boys had been killed by the British. They told me how Colm and the other young volunteer, Eugene McGilligan, had died. A British patrol had attempted to penetrate the Bogside that night, and had met with opposition from the local IRA company. A gun battle had raged for some time just outside Free Derry. Eight of the troops were wounded, three seriously. Colm and Eugene had not been involved and had not been armed. They had come into the area when it was over and were going into a billet when they were shot down without warning. The Brits had left snipers behind at the council flats when they withdrew, knowing that the IRA could not return fire on their positions without endangering the occupants.

There was intense military movement around Derry when it became known that I was present. Unionist politicians, always demanding miracles from British security, complained that Republican leaders were being allowed to come and go as they pleased. I stayed undercover for a day, then slipped out of Free Derry again, this time by car. Before I left, I called up to convey my sympathy to the family of Eugene McGilligan. Although his father did not share the young man's Republican beliefs, they made me welcome and I spent over an hour with them.

The people, as we have seen, were to be railroaded into believing that the only alternative to Heath's weak political "initiative" would be civil war. The package was expected to be announced towards the end of March. On March 4, a mysterious and terrible explosion blasted the Abercorn restaurant in the centre of Belfast. It was a Saturday afternoon, and the restaurant was crowded with shoppers who had come in for tea. Two women were killed and almost one hundred and fifty other people were injured. As in the case of McGurk's Bar a small but extremely powerful bomb had been used, small enough to be left unnoticed under a table. The restaurant itself had no value as a sabotage target. It was a direct attack on civilians.

The British attributed the explosion to the Provisional IRA in propaganda statements which went out immediately, timed to catch all the sensational Sunday newspapers, thus developing maximum

panic effect. The IRA had nothing whatever to do with it, and said so in very clear terms. However, suspicion was to swing in another direction. The *Irish Independent* reproduced a page from a news-sheet issued by the Woodvale Defence Association, an extreme Loyalist group affiliated to the UDA. It complained that the management of the Abercorn restaurant had refused to play the British national anthem in its entertainment programme, and warned that it could expect trouble if this policy persisted.

In spite of this clue, investigations seemed to produce no results, and nobody was ever arrested. It is hard to see why any Loyalist would deliberately bomb the place at a time when it was bound to be crowded with Protestant as well as other shoppers. What we did know was that British intelligence kept a careful eye on all the news-sheets and "mosquito press" publications that flourished in Loyalist and Nationalist districts alike. The reference to the Abercorn would have been noted. It may or may not have been Loyalists who acted on it. Republicans, however, certainly had no quarrel with public places that refused to play *God Save the Queen*. The result of the Abercorn explosion, at any rate, was that first the IRA were blamed, then the Loyalists. Whoever caused it had stoked up sectarian feelings in both directions.

The Abercorn incident was followed by an IRA sabotage operation in Donegall Street in Belfast. Warnings that bombs had been placed were clearly given, as was proven afterwards, but they were not transmitted. Four civilians and two RUC officers were killed, and one hundred and fifty people were injured. Once again British propaganda had a field day, claiming that such operations were aimed against civilians, which was totally untrue. The most extraordinary aspect was that some of the casualties were people who happened to be there because the British had cleared them from another street.

With all the talk of civil war and chaos as the psychological back-up to create a climate of acceptance for Heath's coming proposals, the Republican movement decided to counter with a strong public gesture. On March 10 the IRA ordered a unilateral seventy-two hour truce. This was to demonstrate that the IRA was under effective control and discipline. The revised three-point Republican peace terms, which had been notified to the British in response to their indirect feelers, were made public, and the Republican leadership indicated its readiness to discuss peace on

these terms. The Republican statement emphasised that a positive response was expected from the British government, and that if this were received, military operations would be suspended indefinitely. A negative response, however, would leave the IRA with no option but to renew the resistance campaign with increased activity.

The truce was observed by all IRA units from the moment it became effective. The only operational exception was an instance in which a landmine exploded one hour after the deadline. The unit concerned had not been able to remove it in time, and it wounded a British soldier.

The British did not reciprocate in observing the truce. They simply took advantage of it to move into Nationalist areas of Belfast where they would otherwise have met stiff resistance, making more than twenty arrests. There was a good deal of bitterness about this on our side. But it showed one thing very clearly to our volunteers. The British were not interested in suspending military operations for any benefit this would bring to the civilian population. What could have been a breathing-space to let the people calm down from the talk of civil war and study the peace terms on their merits was deliberately blocked. The British ignored the truce and deliberately maintained the tension until the eve of the announcement of Heath's political "initiatives" at the end of March.

Harold Wilson arrived in Ireland in the meantime, taking soundings from all shades of opinion. He asked to meet representatives of the Republican leadership. I thought it best to stay in the background. The hard-line Tories would not be able to accuse him of negotiating at top level behind Heath's back. Wilson discussed matters with two of our people from the North and one from the South. They impressed on him that our three-point peace proposals were the minimum that would bring about a prolonged truce.

Short one-sided truces were clearly useless. Not only did the British exploit the March ceasefire, but they claimed in their propaganda that the IRA had been forced to call it under the growing pressure of British security operations. When the IRA resumed fighting, the intensified activity immediately proved otherwise. In the first week, well over a hundred sabotage operations were carried out. During the rest of March another four British soldiers were killed and almost fifty injured. RUC casualties in the same period were one dead and several wounded.

Just then I was the target for a bomb myself. When I reached

home after being away for a while Mary said, "I'm glad you've come. This came in the post, and I was wondering what to do with it."

She showed me a parcel which she had sensibly put aside where none of the family would come across it. I took it out of the house, intending to get a better look at it in the back garden. As I did so, a Republican colleague of mine arrived.

"Be careful," I said. "I think it's a parcel bomb."

"For God's sake, give me that," he said. He snatched it from me, and it was actually between us when the device blew up.

His hands were burnt and his beard and hair badly singed. I was slightly burnt on the face, and had a cut in one eye. If the charge had been more powerful, I doubt that either of us would have escaped death or serious injury.

We went down to the hospital for treatment, and I was asked to see an optician. After dealing with my eye, he advised me to wear an eyeshade for a while. Press and television reporters turned up and made a meal out of the damn eyeshade. But some were shrewd enough to ask in their reports how it was that such a device could be delivered when my mail was known to be inspected by the Special Branch. It was certainly a sixty-four dollar question. (The British agent Kenneth Littlejohn was later to claim that he had been reactivated at the end of February, just before this. Although much of his story about planning to assassinate me is pure cock-and-bull, it is nevertheless interesting that he said one way this was to be tried was by "disintegrating" me. In other words, a bomb.)

Between the many leaks, political analyses and our own intelligence reports, we now had a pretty accurate forecast of what Heath's imminent proposals for the North would contain. On March 23 the Republican leadership met to discuss what its attitude would be in the event of certain alternatives. It was unanimously decided that unless the British offer came very close to our own proposals, it would be rejected — and rejected as quickly as possible. The decision was not taken hastily or lightly, but was arrived at after long discussion of what the Heath proposals were likely to contain. It was the combined judgment of the entire leadership. If rejection were necessary, I was selected to announce it publicly.

The next day, Heath produced his "initiatives". Stormont was to be prorogued for a year. The British government would take over direct rule of the North. A British Secretary of State with Cabinet powers would be installed in Belfast. This turned out to be William

Whitelaw. The predictions about the border polls were fully borne out. The package included regular "plebiscites" at intervals of many years.

The Heath plans came nowhere near our terms. Proroguing Stormont meant no more in practical terms than temporarily suspending it — except that the politicians in Belfast would continue to draw their salaries. It was not abolition. As for the "plebiscites", once the automatic Loyalist majority in the gerrymandered North voted to retain partition in the first of these polls, the British would only need to repeat the performance twice to keep Ireland partitioned until the end of the century. The promise that a start would be made towards phasing out internment, while it aroused the hopes of many relatives of men in Long Kesh, was so vague as to be worthless.

We rejected the package.

Four thousand British troops stood by at Minden in Germany, ready to be flown into the North if a crisis developed. It could only develop from the deeply offended Loyalist right. It was the politicians, the media, the churchmen and various establishment quarters who set up the clamour.

North and South, there was a vociferous demand from all these quarters for an immediate ceasefire by the Provisionals. Virtually nobody was concerned with the practicalities of this. Laying down arms with no guarantee would amount to surrender, leaving Republicans wide open to arrest and wholesale round-ups by the military. Many people have said that the Provisionals missed "a great political chance" by not ceasing hostilities when Stormont was prorogued and taking the credit for bringing this about. They were apparently oblivious to the actual situation that existed. And as for "taking the credit," I have yet to meet a single person who ever thought that Stormont fell for any other reason than the armed struggle of the Republican movement. That struggle was not to play politics or to grab momentary praise from the media and the middle class. It was to liberate the country and get the British out of it once and for all.

The British propaganda services reacted as expected. They played their part in Heath's political strategy by spreading reports that some of the IRA units wanted to call a truce. These appeared widely in the newspapers and were quoted by several politicians.

I decided to test opinion in the movement thoroughly. Accordingly a meeting was called at which all the COs of the Northern units were present, with at least two of their staff officers in each case, together with members of the IRA Executive, the Army Council and the GHQ staff. It was a very large gathering which assembled in a hotel at a seaside resort in early April.

Each and every one of the Northern officers reported that they had already conducted extensive inquiries in their own units and among their supporters in the area. They said they were not aware of anyone who favoured a truce on the strength of what the British had so far offered. They put support for the leadership's attitude at one hundred per cent. It was my own firm belief that the leadership of a revolutionary movement did not have the right to take decisions of major military importance without reference to the fighting men and women of the active service units. That very large and successful meeting ended on a note of complete unity. The way to lasting peace in Ireland was not through any colonial compromise imposed by England, but on the basis of the simple, clear proposals we had spelled out, with the English acknowledging the right of the Irish people to determine their own future without foreign interference.

Operations continued. The political pundits spent endless time interviewing each other about the significance of the Heath package. But there was not an iota of difference, of course, in the behaviour of the British troops towards the people who were supposed to be receiving all the imaginary benefits of direct rule. A rifle butt in the stomach or an insult to passing women felt much the same along the Falls, whether the troops delivered it under Faulkner or the new Secretary of State, William Whitelaw, already being hailed by the media as the new miracle man. It was not the pundits who had to trek out to the concentration camp at Lisburn, taking children to see their fathers after long waits and humiliating jeers from the camp guards.

During that spring the IRA engineers working in the Supply Department reported at last that they were in a position to manufacture unlimited quantities of two types of explosive mix. This increased operational potential to a very considerable extent. It meant that both anti-personnel and sabotage operations could now be contemplated on a much wider scale. Plans were quickly drawn up for a landmine offensive. Arrangements were made for turning out improved and strengthened mine cases. The new landmines were

brought into action, and played hell with the British not only in the border areas but all over the North.

The car bomb was also introduced early in 1972, both for strategic and tactical reasons. The strategic aim was to make the government and administration of the occupied North as difficult as possible, simultaneously striking at its colonial economic structure. The British government was ultimately responsible for all compensation for bomb damage. The tactical reason was that the introduction of the car bomb tied down large numbers of British troops in the centre of Belfast and other large towns. While they were stuck there on guard duties, fewer soldiers would be available for offensive counter-insurgency operations or for harassing the people in Nationalist areas under the psychological saturation policy.

Other reasons related to the nature of the new explosive mixes themselves. Prior to the first use of car bombs in March that year, a sabotage operation would generally be carried out by three to five armed men. The bombs used were low-powered, because they were limited in size to what the men themselves could carry in and place on target. The chances of interception on such operations were quite high. The car bomb provided an efficient container and an efficient delivery system. It yielded far greater administrative, industrial and economic damage for a given operation. And it required fewer volunteers to place it on the target.

Many important industrial and commercial targets, which had previously been poor targets for low-powered manhandled devices, now became vulnerable. Because of the much higher volume of damage bound to be inflicted on the enemy economy in such operations, long warnings were given in each case so that wider areas could be cleared. Not only did the British have to employ many more troops to protect the centre of Belfast, but every town in the North now had to have a stronger garrison. At the same time, anti-handling devices of increasing effectiveness were incorporated in the car bombs.

It was very hard for the enemy to find direct answers to the car bomb, whether technical or strategic. They tried sealing off towns. They prohibited parking. They prevented traffic coming into central areas at all. The troops they had in the North were now spread even thinner on the ground, as they were deployed to enforce these methods in outlying towns. The diversion of traffic hit the economic and commercial life of the business communities, stifling profit-

making and turning many places virtually into ghost towns. Nor did all the restrictions prevent the units getting the car bombs through. The net result was that the resistance had great success in its objective of sabotaging the economy of the occupied area.

Four years later, in the intense sabotage offensive of March 1974, this was strikingly shown when a car bomb blew out an army headquarters in Royal Avenue in the centre of Belfast, and the Northern capitalists on the brink of total economic panic howled to London for help.

The British had to seek desperately for an effective means of neutralising the weapon. They resorted to "black" propaganda which attempted to show that the car bomb was deliberately intended to kill civilians. The all too frequent "mysteries" about warnings that were not passed on or supposed to have been bungled clearly fit into such a counter-strategy.

One of the tactics used by our opponents in this period was to give the total number of civilian casualties in the conflict and to hold the Republican movement responsible for them. The true position, however, was that for every civilian accidentally killed as a result of IRA operations, at least ten or twelve were killed by the British army or reactionary pro-British forces. The real, outstanding responsibility was ignored. It was the British government that was primarily to blame for all the bloodshed and loss of life arising out of the situation in the North. The secondary responsibility, as I myself repeatedly stressed, lay with the successive Dublin governments which stood idly by for half a century, doing nothing about partition while its tragic results came remorselessly to a head.

The fact that the British had not reciprocated our one-sided March truce weighed heavily with members of the public. It was therefore surprising that, at the end of April, a leading member of the movement proposed that we should call a thirty-day truce. Opinion within the movement was against it. Other approaches were made by politicians. It would have been a great mistake to take too many of these approaches at face value. Often they were a tactic to try to divide the leadership from outside. Some of us were then held up as "political tacticians" amenable to peace talks, and others as hardliners "obsessed with violence." I was usually included in the latter category.

When the resistance refused to give way to the establishment clamour for a ceasefire, it was certain the Lynch government would

increase pressure on Republicans in the South. The previous December my house had been raided by Gardai. I was rather taken aback when, in the course of their search, they found a single cartridge. It was not my practice to be negligent about such matters, but a great variety of people had been visiting and staying, and there it was. The police said they would just confiscate the round and there would be no more about it. A couple of months later, however, a summons was delivered while I was away. This made up my mind. I left my home completely. The case went to court, but I did not attend. In my absence I was sentenced to a fine of ten pounds or a month's imprisonment. I did not pay the fine, and now I went undercover altogether.

I went to Belfast disguised as a Christian Brother. I made a roundabout trip up and was dropped at my pickup point ten minutes before time, which is not the best way to do these things. However, in the war conditions in Belfast, one had to allow for daily disruptions of traffic, and split-second timing was not always possible. As I had not seen that day's papers yet, I went into a newsagent's while I was waiting.

Coming out, I encountered an assistant from the butcher's shop nearby. He smiled and said, "I think I know you."

"I don't think you do," I said distantly.

"I'm sure I've seen you in Dublin," he persisted. I had run into one of the few people in the North who didn't know when to mind their own business.

"I doubt it," I said, keeping my eyes skinned for the car.

Then he said, "You look very much like that fellow MacStiofáin." An army, several intelligence services and a couple of police forces looking for me, and I had to be buttonholed by this character.

"Shut your mouth," I said in very unclerical tones.

When my pickup man arrived, I told him. A couple of volunteers dropped into the shop and advised my chance acquaintance against mentioning my presence in the city. He kept quiet in Belfast, but later on he became talkative and described his meeting to someone in Dundalk, who promptly reported it. On receiving a second visit from Republicans, he realised that word in Ireland travels farther and faster than he imagined. He apologised.

I changed my disguise in Belfast, and in parts of the city I moved around quite openly. I spent quite a bit of time observing British patrol procedure and methods introduced in the months since

internment. The oppressive atmosphere of military occupation was now total. The armoured patrols were more like convoys, with vehicles rumbling around in threes keeping radio contact. Foot patrols and static guards were everywhere. Women military police searched shoppers. Every uniform, every Saracen, every weapon, every British soldier with his head turning, never able to relax for a single moment, was an admission that this was the only way the English presence in Ireland could now be maintained — by naked force. The Victorian capitalists built much of Belfast to resemble certain British cities. It was easy to imagine these troops in the streets of Glasgow or Cardiff if the prospect which Brigadier Kitson discusses in his theories came to pass. He was prepared for “other potential trouble spots in the United Kingdom” and the British army would be required to “restore the position rapidly.”

I had a meal with a companion in a restaurant near an RUC barracks. Through the window we watched British troops moving up and down the road outside, stopping people, studying them, questioning them. “Where do you live? Where are you going? Where are you coming from?” We waited in the restaurant until they had gone. Then I went on to meet the IRA battalion commanders in the city and the Belfast brigade staff.

We had long discussions over a wide range of policy matters that day, and I listened carefully to their estimates of the situation. I came away in good heart and confident. There was a capable and determined leadership in Belfast, well seasoned by now in advanced urban guerrilla warfare. As the IRA’s battle experience grew, so did that determination. It was too late for the British now. There was no way they could take that experience away from the resistance fighters, or from those who stood ready to replace them. The streets, the big housing estates, even the very camps and jails, were all the guerrilla academies of the revolution. The defiant Northern youth of 1968 had matured into the skilled freedom fighters of 1972, and all the time they were reinforced by a steady flow of young people who knew all the arts of exploiting the shortcomings of conventional armies.

The cult of personality carefully built up around William Whitelaw was designed to win him the support of the women, particularly the better-off ones, in the Catholic communities. He was concerned only about the people of the North, he was interested in hearing the views of *all* the people, etc., etc. He went out of his way to be polite and said that everybody should stop talking about what was past and



Peaceful Irish scene in the Mourne Mountains. Most of the Six Counties consist of rural land with narrow country lanes like this one. (*Northern Ireland Tourist Board*)



Led by a priest, a long column of families evacuate their embattled housing estate in Lenadoon in 1972 in protest against the heavy concentration of British troops in the area. (*Syndication International*)

A group training session for members of the Provisional IRA in the “no-go” area of Free Derry — an IRA stronghold. (*Keystone Press*)





Joseph McCann lies "in state" at his home in Belfast after being shot by British troops in 1972. (*Keystone Press*)



An IRA fighter holding an M1 Carbine silhouetted against a flaming barricade during the unrest which followed internment in 1971.

Two photographs illustrating how even the young are caught up in the violence of Northern Ireland.

Right: A young boy waves an effigy of a British soldier.
(Press Association)



Left: A seven-year-old boy stands on a street-corner making petrol bombs. (Syndication International)

build a new Northern Ireland. He made great use of television. It was not his policies that a certain sector of his audience considered, but his personality. The less political grasp such viewers had of what he was talking about, the more they told each other that he was a nice, patient man.

In 1972 the Republican movement was able to hold big Easter commemorations in the Northern cities, the first under war conditions for many years. The leadership in Derry asked me to deliver the oration there on Easter Sunday. By then, I must have been the most wanted man in Ireland, but I willingly agreed.

Next day I visited as many people in Free Derry as I could manage to, then went back to where I was staying to have lunch before the commemoration ceremonies. I heard some interesting things about myself on the radio. On BBC, as usual when the journalists were not sure what was going on, they were interviewing each other. One in London was asking a British correspondent in the North what kind of person Séan MacStiofáin was. With an air of great knowledge, I was described as very dour, not a very friendly type, and held more in fear than respect by members of the movement. The man said that though I was a fanatic about the Irish language, I did not speak it very well. I had to laugh. The only contact that particular correspondent and I had ever had was when he reached me by phone one night, asked for an interview and was told that I had to decline. His paper had come out from under its liberal banner and was showing increasingly anti-Irish attitudes. He had no knowledge of the national language himself and was in no position to be sure whether I spoke good, bad or indifferent Irish.

During the meal, the radio was returned to RTE, and I heard Cardinal Conway, the Primate of all Ireland, make a vicious attack on me in an interview. He was telling the public that I and other Republican leaders remained in the South, living at home with our wives and families. I wondered what Mary would make of that. Outside the door in Free Derry, people were coming out, getting ready to reassert their resistance in a great gathering under the noses of the British. I thought it was a pity that the Cardinal should waste air-time in such an unfortunate manner. He could have been encouraging his people to resist the injustices of British rule, instead of attacking those who were trying to end it.

In May an item appeared in Southern newspapers mentioning me and saying that the outstanding fine for possession of the bullet I

referred to earlier had been paid. It certainly hadn't been paid by me, but technically there was now nothing to prevent my returning home. I didn't see how the press would get hold of this information, unless it had been fed to them. I stayed away.

The same weekend, the game became clear. The Social Democratic Labour Party, which Lynch had promised to finance just after Bloody Sunday, played along with Whitelaw's latest colonial reform stunt — the announcement of an "advisory commission" for the North. They called on prominent Catholics who had resigned from appointments under Stormont to resume their positions in public life. And synchronised with these efforts, Lynch's government proclaimed the reintroduction of Part V of the Offences Against the State Act. It authorised the setting up of a special court with three judges, but no jury. The following Wednesday there were raids by squads of Gardai and Special Branch men. Rúairí Ó Brádaigh was arrested at his home, and Joe Cahill at the Sinn Féin offices in Kevin Street in Dublin. Next day Ruairí's brother Seán, the Sinn Féin publicity director, was arrested.

I was buying a new suit for myself in a border town when I heard the news. The search was reported to be continuing for Dave O'Connell and myself. I dived under again, in disguise.

It was exactly four months since Bloody Sunday, since the week the British embassy was burnt and five of Lynch's Fianna Fáil ministers had knelt by the coffins of the paratroopers' victims in Derry.

The campaign continued at high pitch. During April and May sixteen British soldiers were killed in the North. The bombing offensive was appreciably stepped up. It was around then that certain businessmen found a way to turn the conflict to their own profit. They usually do. We began to get requests, accompanied by offers of sums of money, to have shops, pubs, hotels and other premises blown up to order for compensation or insurance purposes. All units were given express instructions from HQ to turn such approaches down flat. The people in question were told, "The Republican movement is a revolutionary organisation, not a mafia." Some of them then made other arrangements to carry out their schemes, and there were always freelances who were willing to take on such jobs. It was made known that the IRA took an extremely serious view of

any attempt to attribute this kind of activity to the movement. The message appeared to be taken to heart.

One group had to be dismissed from the movement for the unofficial destruction of all three petrol stations in an area which was almost one hundred per cent Nationalist. The consequence of this foolish action was that the people had to go several miles out of their way for petrol and, as can be imagined, were less than sympathetic with the Republican movement for quite a while.

Post office vans were burned all over the North, particularly in south Armagh, Fermanagh and Tyrone. The mail is an imperial responsibility. The British could not afford to let it be obvious to senders of mail from countries all over the world that they were unable to deliver it in areas where they were supposed to be in military control. We knew they would react by putting heavy escorts on the mail vans, thus offering more targets.

One morning shortly afterwards, there appeared a clumsy convoy of three heavy armoured vehicles escorting three mail vans. They took all day to make a round that would normally be completed by a single van in a couple of hours. Troops and armour were drawn off other duties and tied down, and landmine teams had targets in the form of the rear or leading armoured car. But after two days, the postmen refused to go out at all unless the escort was taken off. Despite its powerful propaganda effect, the burning of the mail vans was not continued, because it caused great inconvenience even though areas where there was solid support for the movement saw the purpose of it and never complained.

Early in May, the Republican prisoners in Crumlin Road jail informed HQ through their line out that they were going on hunger strike to back their demand for political status, which had been refused. Five would start the strike about the tenth of the month. They would be joined by five others each week until the issue was decided one way or the other.

A hunger strike, of course, is a combined weapon. The effort of the jail fighter inside must be matched by a massive campaign outside. We knew this campaign was absolutely essential. Dave O'Connell was appointed to co-ordinate it in the South, and a hunger strike fund of some fifteen hundred pounds was allocated to buy publicity space. Billy McKee was in the first five prisoners who launched the strike, and the rest joined in as planned until twenty Republicans were involved. By the second week the movement was

holding meetings and demonstrations throughout the North. The *Irish News*, printing in the very heart of the military occupation, was swamped with advertisements in support. By contrast, two Dublin newspapers timidly refused to accept a half page ad.

The British propaganda characters did not let this pass without counter-tactics, of course. The British media were suddenly filled with speculative stories that the IRA was trying to provoke a "Protestant backlash," and in the usual slavish fashion, these were imitated by Southern organs of opinion. This did not torpedo the effectiveness of the strike. Due to the courage and determination of the Republican prisoners, and O'Connell's magnificent co-ordination of the back-up effort, they were conceded political status and ended the strike. The Loyalist prisoners in Crumlin Road enjoyed a very different kind of "backlash." They were accorded political status, too.

The press speculation, however, had worried some sections of the public, as had been intended by those who originated it. It added extra impetus to peace calls that had already been stirred up by something else. On May 21 in Derry, a young local man named William Best, who had joined the British army, was executed by members of the NLF. He was stationed abroad with the Royal Irish Rangers, one of the regiments the British could not trust for work in the North, and had come home on leave to see his mother. My information about the Ranger Best case was that, while on leave, he had frequently been out at night stoning British troops, was not going to return to his base in Germany, and intended to remain in the Free Derry area.

There was a fierce reaction to the killing. The NLF attitude was that he was a member of the army that had committed the Bloody Sunday massacre in that very place, but it was an attitude I could never share myself. If the IRA knew that Ranger Best was not going to report back, he would surely have told the NLF the same thing when they took him away. At any rate, Free Derry had the spectacle of two hundred women marching in protest to the local NLF headquarters.

This reinforced the "peace at any price" brigade to a considerable extent. There were counter-demonstrations, including a very large one by Provisional volunteers and supporters. But political opportunities of all hues jumped on the bandwagon and used the Ranger Best business to back the calls for a ceasefire by the IRA, who had nothing to do with it. This stupid killing had given them a chance to

promote division and dissension in the midst of the most successful no-go area in the entire North.

Enormous pressures were immediately built up for a one-sided ceasefire by the IRA. What one observer called "instant stardom" was conferred on every tiny peace committee, whose meetings were given even greater coverage by Southern press and television than by the British or the Unionists. Far bigger rallies by Republicans were ignored or barely mentioned, but at all these rallies the same point was made. If the struggle ended without real political independence, another and bigger confrontation would inevitably lie ahead.

Peace pickets paraded up and down outside the Sinn Féin offices in Kevin Street, and some of the Dublin workers went down and presented the pickets with copies of the IRA truce terms. My own comment was that if they had put half as much effort earlier into picketing Unionist headquarters in Belfast, British army HQ at Lisburn, and Downing Street in London, demanding a proper two-sided truce with guarantees, one might have come much sooner.

The Provisional leadership stood firm in the face of all these pressures. But the NLF did not. On May 30, an announcement from Gardiner Place said that military action on their part was terminated. No terms were mentioned.

Northern and other politicians for once summed up the situation quite accurately. Their reaction was that, since the NLF had never equalled the Provisional scale of activity, little or no effect could be expected from their ceasefire. Ninety per cent of operational activity in the North had been carried out by the Provisionals anyway. Craig brushed the NLF announcement aside as "unimportant."

Neither the NLF nor anyone else gained much by their withdrawal. A few of their internees were released. But their popularity and their political base were in no way strengthened. The Provisionals fought on. During the next four weeks, fatal and other casualties inflicted on the occupation troops were the highest for any month since the start of the campaign.

If the active service volunteers wished to call off the struggle, the Provisional leadership could not force them to do otherwise. Spokesmen representing Belfast, Derry and units in Fermanagh, Tyrone and Armagh made the attitude of their units plain. It was in accordance with the general decision taken at the big meeting of all Northern OCs in April. It was "Carry on the fight." What was more, several NLF units wanted to come over to us.

A summer landmine offensive was prepared. Selected parties of volunteers were brought out of combat and trained in new methods which would elevate landmine tactics to a far more effective role in guerrilla warfare. This advanced mine course, together with the strengthened new mine casings that had now been perfected, did much to produce the results which were to make the British move in deadly fear of these weapons.

The IRA engineers who devised the explosive mixes that came in that year had overcome all problems but one. Some of the stuff smelled quite strongly. That summer the lads must have used more shaving lotion than any resistance movement in history.

Chapter 15

Soundings

Our successes depended on the initiative of our combat troops or active service volunteers. Guerrilla fighters require far more personal initiative than regular troops whose decisions are made for them at all levels. Guerrillas operating in small units, often in two-man battle teams or on their own, must frequently use their own judgment if they are to survive, let alone operate successfully. Operate successfully the active service volunteers certainly did. And their initiative increased further as they saw the results their own fighting ability could produce.

The summer of 1972 brought a big increase in successful operations against the British occupation forces. During May alone the British logged 1,223 engagements and shooting incidents, and ninety-four explosions. The sabotage offensive continued to disrupt the day-to-day working of direct rule. Coming on to June, the active service units raised the pressure still more.

A major factor in the stepping up of Republican attacks was the wider and more imaginative use of landmines. Until April of that year this form of warfare had not been thoroughly exploited by the IRA. But as the skill and experience of our engineers increased, during the early summer it became much more sophisticated. We had come a long way from the old butter-box mines. Far stronger containers were used, giving better explosive power. Many landmines were now fitted with remote control and anti-handling devices which made them a dangerous proposition for British ordnance and bomb disposal experts to deal with. Operational landmine parties also showed a lot more skill in selecting positions for mines and concealing them.

The same thing was happening in the use of booby-traps, partly through improved designs and partly through closer liaison between IRA engineers and intelligence. The intelligence people would relay reports to the British that such-and-such a house was being used by guerrillas. A raiding party would arrive and check out all doors and windows for booby-traps or wires. Finding nothing, they would conclude the house was clean and break in. When they were well inside, walking on a floorboard would trigger the activating device. The British lost four dead this way in one rural area. The internal booby-traps had two advantages: they were harder to find; and while a door or window trap might only get the first soldier who activated it, several of the raiding party might be inside the house by the time the floorboard type went off. During these months, even trickier versions were developed. The intelligence officers did a good deal more thinking about the psychology of the raiding enemy patrols, and the engineers worked out devices to match until the whole business became a real battle of wits.

Many administrative and economic targets continued to be effectively sabotaged. Up to June nearly thirty telephone exchanges had been completely destroyed. More than thirty were seriously damaged, and around twenty slightly damaged. Town halls, local authority headquarters and rent and rates offices were bombed in support of the rent and rates strike which thousands of people had kept up as a protest against internment. A number of income tax offices were destroyed by explosion and fire. Our campaign was adding to problems and costs for the occupation regime. The car-bomb campaign of intensive sabotage in the centre of Belfast continued, drawing off battalions of troops for special guard duties.

It also put a heavy load on the British bomb disposal experts. Several of them were killed or injured trying to beat the anti-handling devices. They wasted endless time examining completely harmless cars reported to them as suspicious. As British resources became more strained and their casualties increased, they could no longer spend hours carefully dismantling a suspected car bomb. Instead, they used cruder methods, blowing up a door or a lid open with a small controlled charge, or even exploding the car altogether by firing a bazooka at it after clearing the street. Psychologically, of course, all this activity by the military, and the additional explosions they caused, helped to spread the impression that IRA guerrillas were everywhere and held the initiative. And indeed this was so. We were

also able to alternate operations between city and rural areas more or less at will.

Numerous successful attacks were made on electrical installations. Some were wrecked by bombs. In other cases transformer relays could be quietly sabotaged simply by draining out the special oil in them.

I continued keeping close personal contact with the commanders of the active service areas, and as far as possible I would meet them weekly. These regular meetings were advantageous both to them and to me. Getting their reports at first hand, the decision process was shortened, security was improved because these reports did not have to pass through various intermediaries, and I could make an immediate appraisal of situations still going on. The weekly system also meant that operational tactics which had been successfully developed in one area could be quickly adopted by another. It was useful for morale as well. Instead of going through bureaucratic channels, the local volunteers had the opportunity of presenting their problems to the national leadership once a week. In this way serious grievances or misunderstandings could not build up for longer than a few days. Morale is obviously more important with soldiers than with anyone else. Yet, as I had seen for myself in the British services, the red tape arrangements of conventional armies seem to be designed to drag out a problem as long as possible before the brass makes any effort to solve it. In a guerrilla volunteer force, the sensible thing is to deal with problems with the minimum of delay so as to avoid reducing a unit's efficiency.

On the enemy side, General Tuzo was still sticking to his colonial idea that he could eventually get a military victory. But our monitoring of the various British media showed up some idiotic contradictions between their propaganda in Belfast and London. While Tuzo was claiming the IRA were near defeat, some of the London experts gave the game away by calling for long-term security measures in the North including extended curfews, the introduction of identity passes for everybody, and even sealing off the border. We noticed that British army recruitment advertisements at the time never alluded to service in the North. Soldiers were shown aiming gigantic long-range artillery, presumably at the Russians, or enjoying themselves in sunny foreign parts where there was no fighting going on. Later on, these advertisements had to admit that officer recruits

might wind up making decisions in “a riot” in the North. This was the first time the advertising agencies which handled the British army recruiting campaign acknowledged that any conflict existed in Ireland at all. It is hard enough for any army to get recruits in a modern industrial economy where young men want nothing to do with establishment bull and regimentation. The prospect of getting killed on top of it for the sake of discredited Unionists obviously wasn’t going to attract many of them into leaving their civilian jobs. As casualties went up in the North, the recruiting figures started to dive, and so did the quality of the new intakes.

As midsummer approached, there was a great deal of pull and tug going on among different military and political factions in the British and Unionist camps. Nobody who knew anything about the situation could believe that the British had a chance of operating a unified policy. The old Unionist Party was fragmented into Faulkner’s crowd, Paisley’s Democratic Unionist Party, the Vanguard wild men led by Craig, the Loyalist Association of Workers led by Billy Hull, the UDA/UVF armed extremists, and the middle-class fur coats who had gone over to the new Alliance Party in the way that some English Tories go over to the Liberals.

There were policy differences in the British army, too, though the media kept them well hidden from the public. On the one hand, there was the conventional policy headed by General Tuzo, the British GOC in the North, of colonial garrison tactics with ordinary battle formations and equipment. The rival policy was the counter-insurgency strategy developed by Brigadier Kitson. Like most of the British officer class, he seemed convinced that revolutions are mostly run by communists. If the British were going to waste their time barking up that tree, all the better.

Kitson and other British senior officers also disagreed with each other about the effects of the Irish emergency on the efficiency of their army. The British had the problem of keeping up their commitments to NATO and finding enough troops to hold down the North. The media were told that it was good for battalions to be switched between nuclear-armed forces in Germany and “security” duty in Ireland, because this made them “flexible” and “versatile.” People who didn’t understand modern armies might have believed this rubbish, but the defence ministers and commanders of the other NATO countries would not, and neither did Kitson. He admitted what was obvious, that every time a battalion was withdrawn from

the Rhine army in this way it quickly lost its mechanised skills. Tours of duty of a few months at a time in the emergency area were "thoroughly unsatisfactory" with units becoming less efficient and men more discontented. Using technical specialists as infantry in street situations was expensive and wasteful, and indeed it was necessary to pull two artillery units out of service to get one infantry unit of the same strength.

By the end of May, it appeared to us that neither British military experts nor the politicians had any real solution in sight. When London at last realised that Tuzo was not going to be able to deliver a military victory by conventional colonial methods, more support naturally swung over to the Kitson counter-insurgency formula. But Kitson turned out to be no miracle man either. At first he estimated that the situation in the North might be "resolved" by 1975. Then he extended the period, without ruling out the possibility that the emergency could continue up to 1980. Oddly enough, it was after Kitson's departure at the end of April that the British stepped up their use of special counter-insurgency methods. Tuzo was recalled some months later, to be replaced by General Sir Frank King, a less arrogant figure with very little to say. Tuzo and Kitson were both given important commands. In the British army, failure does not seem to affect the careers of the professional officers caste.

When an enemy does not appear to be very clear about his military or political strategy, it usually pays to hit him as hard as possible while he is trying to make up his mind. As the IRA carried the conflict into a new phase of intensity in May and June, widespread sniping operations supported the improved landmine tactics and the sabotage offensive.

But once the public saw that the Republican resistance now held the initiative, it was to the Republicans that a growing number of peace calls were directed. These posed a considerable problem, for while many were genuine, others were highly suspect. All wars have to end sometime, and there could be several outcomes to the present conflict. One, the colonial position would remain unchanged, which was what Craig and friends wanted. Two, the old structures would be reformed, but of course with no real changes. This was what Faulkner wanted. Three, a neo-colonial set-up would emerge if the new Northern assembly and a Council of Ireland functioned, as visualised by the British. This was what the SDLP and the Dublin

politicians wanted. Fourth, a free Ireland restored to its natural territorial and economic unity was what *we* wanted. Certainly the sacrifices and suffering of revolutionary war can never be justified by mere reform.

The point was that you couldn't get something called "peace" on its own. It could only come with one or another of these stages, and if it came with any form of colonialism the "peace" would not last very long. If the struggle were simply to be dropped at that point, then the people of the North would not only have suffered in vain for three years, but would have to live through it yet again when continued English occupation provoked the next wave of armed resistance. We were only too conscious of these sufferings, and certainly none of the leadership wished the people to make sacrifices or undergo the strain of war for longer than was necessary. We understood that the deliberate brutality of British soldiers was aimed at wearing down popular morale. But we were confident, though God knows it was not easy to ask it of them, that if they held fast a while longer, the political system that had exploited and degraded them would never rise again, and the British would have to come to terms.

By the end of May, however, the demands and calls for peace were mounting more loudly. Some were made by prominent people in public statements, and some by deputations requesting to see members of the Republican leadership. Other peace proposals reached us through private or indirect channels.

Dealing with these proposals needed more and more time. I had now been moving about under cover for several months. Since the arrests of Rúarí Ó Brádaigh and Joe Cahill on May 26, all leading members of the movement had gone underground as well. It was not easy, or often even possible, to meet everyone who wanted to discuss peace plans with us. When we did, unfortunately, such meetings in many cases only dispirited both sides who took part in them. Time after time I or one of my comrades would cross the country, frequently in disguise, to find when we arrived at the meeting that the peace "plan" we had been invited to discuss didn't exist at all.

These contacts were frustrating and sometimes saddening for us. Some of these visitors were fine, decent and patriotic people whose real concern was what the people had been through, and we appreciated their motives. But it was difficult to sit there in the middle of a revolution, short of sleep, on the run, dog-tired after

travelling miles on narrow, twisting back roads to avoid being tailed, and patiently try to get them to understand that there were more kinds of peace than one.

Early in June a priest and a former member of the movement arranged an appointment with me. They brought a mimeographed memorandum, which began: "Point one. If the campaign continues there is likely to be a frightful slaughter of Catholics between now and the end of the year." That was a common formula, peace by intimidation.

The proposals which commanded the most respect were those arrived at in a democratic manner. If several hundred people met in a community hall, discussed and agreed a proposal and elected spokesmen to put it to the Republican leadership, we knew they represented a sizeable body of opinion (though not necessarily the majority) in a certain area. But there were at least three other kinds of peace overtures which had very different origins.

One was the kind built up by the media. With the advent of television, a lot of people seemed to reflect what the media thought, so that various groups of "peace women" were portrayed on television as influential when in fact they had nothing like the support in Nationalist areas they were claimed to have. The second kind of approach was carried out by people trying to strengthen their own power bases. These included businessmen from both North and South whose only attitude to the struggle for freedom was that it was bad for profits, as well as politicians who fancied themselves as important mediators or were anxious for jobs in parliament. The third of these types of peace feeler was through enemy intrigue.

Politicians in London, Belfast and Dublin had a common interest in bringing the fighting to an end as quickly as possible. The British wanted to end the embarrassment which the Derry massacre, interrogation under torture and other brutalities had exposed them to in the face of world opinion. In the whole course of history, there has seldom been a war when one side has not tried to weaken the other by promoting phoney peace campaigns. The British were able to feed encouragement and support to various peace groups through quite legitimate channels, and even reputable public people could be used, knowingly or unknowingly, as fronts and contact men. The amount of Republican counter-intelligence work needed to sort out the real motives and the real sponsors in every case would have been enormous. The simplest way was to be highly selective, meet nobody

who had not been checked out and vouched for, and to give priority to spokesmen who had been democratically chosen by their communities.

Sooner or later, peace would come, but we were determined that it would come with national justice. The Republican movement was fighting on now because we wanted it to be the last time that the people would have to endure the sufferings of a guerrilla campaign. And for it to be that, it must end in a political solution consistent with Ireland's national objectives.

After our experience the previous March, the Republican leadership took a collective decision that we would never again engage in a one-sided truce. When we suspended operations for seventy-two hours, the British army had simply taken advantage of us. However, the Republican leadership decided on a formula that would keep the door open with the British government. We would consider a truce, firstly if we saw that it could lead to meaningful discussion of our demands, secondly if it were properly negotiated before any suspension of operations and clearly understood to be bilateral and binding on both sides, and thirdly if it provided safeguards for our own personnel. But we would not be stampeded into any one-sided ceasefire that would leave the entire initiative with the Brits, leave men open to arrest, and result in a needless loss of ground.

Quite suddenly and unexpectedly, there came a new peace proposal. This differed considerably from any that had been put up before. Around the ninth or tenth of June two Republicans from Derry came south to see me. They were hard-liners in both military and political terms, and there was no compromise in the make-up of either man.

They presented an idea which impressed me very much. It was that we should hold a press conference inside the Free Derry area and offer to suspend offensive operations for a seven-day period, provided that Whitelaw agreed publicly to meet us.

They assured me they had consulted their local military leadership in Derry. This was an important point. It meant that the proposal had clearance from members actively engaged in the armed struggle in a combat area.

What was more, the scheme itself had merit. It would create an opening to put our terms for a settlement formally to the British. It enabled us to offer a truce that was not unconditional, not one-sided,

and not for an indefinite period. Furthermore, it was a good moment from the military standpoint, for we were not only strong but at that time we held the initiative. If we could continue to inflict high British casualties and step up the sabotage campaign it would be difficult for them to bear the strain and the drain on the economy, and no government in Western Europe could be prepared to continue indefinitely in such a situation. They were really in no position to sneer at a truce. In fact, the line being taken by the media in pushing the activities of the various peace groups was that peace could be restored if only the IRA was willing to suspend operations.

Under the circumstances, it would certainly do us no harm to show willing. I had it very much in mind that by making a public offer we could reasonably insist on a public reply. If Whitelaw accepted, that would bind the British to a bargain and make the truce bilateral, so that they couldn't get away with arresting people wholesale as they had done in March. If Whitelaw on the other hand made a public refusal, Britain's stock would go down, the onus of rejecting a reasonable offer would be on London, and we would be none the worse off. Millions of people the world over would immediately draw the conclusion that England was more interested in beating all Irish resistance into the ground than in a peaceful settlement.

I accepted the idea in principle and assured the men who brought it that I would convey it to the collective leadership within a few hours. There was a unanimous decision in favour of acceptance. The road to the summer truce was open. Now it was up to the British.

Immediate steps were taken to inform all units throughout the North of our intention to hold a press conference in Derry. This would prevent them being taken by surprise when its real purpose emerged. They were to hold themselves in readiness for further instructions.

On the night of Tuesday, June 12 I went into Free Derry with Dave O'Connell. I was already reported to have been in hiding up there for some time, but this was untrue. I travelled from the Midlands to Donegal by car and waited for the contact. My escort knew their business, and I was never caught on those trips in and out. We turned left off the main road. Almost immediately there was a right-hand turn into an alleyway just wide enough to take a car, and at the end of it was the no-go area of Free Derry. By the time we

slipped in, I was tired from my travels and getting very irritated with my disguise.

The conference was arranged for three o'clock the following afternoon, but no notice was given until the morning. Just as we were going down to the hall where it was to be held, one of the Derry staff people reported that there were very few pressmen there yet. Dave and I decided to wait for another half-hour. At least this showed that security was tight in the units. If anyone had been talking, the place would have been teeming with newsmen already. When we walked into the hall there were around thirty pressmen and three or four television crews waiting, which was about the attendance we could expect on that notice. Séamus Twomey was there to represent the Belfast men and women, and Martin McGuinness the movement in Derry.

When the conference was over I wanted to meet the Derry peace women who had been built up by television and the press. Accompanied by a local young man, Joe McCallion, I called to one house after another. Either there was no answer or we were told they were out. Eventually we called to Mrs Doherty's house in the Creggan. Her husband told me the peace women were having a meeting there. I was brought into the sitting-room and introduced. I had been prepared to find it packed with people, but the much publicised pressure group turned out to consist of a committee of five. My arrival caused quite a stir among them.

"My God, you're heavily disguised, Mr MacStiofáin," one of the women said.

I pointed out to her that I was on the run North and South. She could hardly expect me to move around otherwise if I were to come up here and meet them. I noted that on a previous public occasion they had insisted on referring to me as "Stephenson."

"Oh," one of them said pertly, "we knew you'd take more notice of us if we did that."

It was a very vocal meeting. The women immediately demanded a "ceasefire."

"We've just proposed a truce," I told them.

They hadn't heard about the press conference yet. This caused a great commotion. But when they learned we had offered a seven-day suspension the discussion got very heated. Why hadn't we gone for a month, or even two months?

But the British didn't need two months to say yes or no. I told the

women they were pressuring the wrong person. "We'll have to wait and see," I said. "The British still have to reply."

Joe and I were invited to stay for tea and I was photographed with the peace committee. After about an hour, I left. Walking back to the car, I found another group of women waiting. I thought, now what?

"Are you Seán MacStiofáin?"

"Yes, I am."

But what came next was a pleasant surprise. Instead of putting demands they said, "Well, those women you've just been to see, the peace women, they don't represent many people around here. In fact, they don't represent anyone except themselves." They said they hoped we wouldn't let ourselves be influenced by what the first group had to say. I told them not to worry and thanked them for their support. It was a significant and heartening incident. There was no shortage of brave women in the North. The Republican movement still had no need to fear for the strength of its support in Derry, from people who had been harassed and beaten by British troops month after month until the no-go area was set up. The British had set the seal on it on Bloody Sunday.

For the rest of the evening we stayed in our billet, paying close attention to television coverage of our announcement and the reactions to it. We were quite pleased with what had gone out so far. But when I saw shots of myself on the screen in disguise, I decided that the time had definitely come to get rid of that moustache. It had grown into one of the most atrocious I had ever seen, and now it was a complete liability. I excused myself, went up to the bathroom and took much pleasure in removing the moustache in a neat, quick operation. A few weeks previously I had changed my hairstyle as well, and now I altered it back. I came downstairs feeling more like myself.

The British answer was not long coming. By the time the ten o'clock news came on, Whitelaw had issued a statement rejecting our truce offer. This rejection was claimed to be in line with Whitelaw's known policy of ruling out any meetings with "terrorists." I listened to it with no great surprise, for we had anticipated that they might say no. The fact was that while our press conference was in progress that afternoon, Whitelaw had personally received members of the UDA inner council in a meeting at their request. They arrived at

Stormont Castle wearing masks or with their faces hidden by coats. During the meeting General Tuzo landed in the castle grounds in his personal helicopter. This was the politician who claimed he never met men of violence.

The brush-off from Whitelaw brought widespread disappointment and resentment among the Nationalist population, especially when word of his dealings with the masked UDA leaders came out. But sympathy and support for us immediately rose, for it was the British who had rejected a truce. On top of this, a rumour went around that Billy McKee had died on his hunger strike in Crumlin Road prison. Later we were very relieved to hear that this was not true, but for the time being it added to the anger. Crowds seized buses in Belfast and set them on fire as a protest. Republican units continued to operate, and during that day and evening there was firing in Belfast and Strabane.

I felt in our billet that night that we had not done badly for the effort of the past few days. Our case had been very considerably strengthened among the Nationalist community. We had succeeded in neutralising the “peace at any price” elements.

Though our public approach had failed, before the night was over the first undercover approach towards negotiations was suggested to us. John Hume and Paddy Devlin were not sure that Whitelaw fully understood that our offer of a truce had been a serious one. The two SDLP politicians offered to contact him privately on our behalf. We decided to play it by ear. My reply was that this was okay with us, as long as it was understood that the politicians were acting on their own and were not representing us.

Eventually John Hume came back and reported that he had seen Whitelaw and made it clear that the truce offer was on the level. Whitelaw responded by saying he would like a meeting with the Provisional leadership, but that this was “not possible immediately.” In the meantime, a preliminary meeting with members of Whitelaw’s staff was suggested. The proposal was that this would be held at Stormont Castle. The Republicans taking part would have to be all from the North and “not too well known.” The politicians, true to form, had written themselves into the plan. Paddy Devlin and John himself were to be present as intermediaries or observers.

I rejected this completely. If we sent anybody, they would be people of sufficient prominence to speak with authority on behalf of

the movement. If the British were interested in talking, let them talk on a clear and sensible basis.

My reply on behalf of the leadership named four conditions if there were to be a meeting to discuss a truce: first, the granting of political status or treatment for the Republican prisoners in the North, several of whom had been on hunger strike for nearly five weeks; second, no restrictions on the choice of Republican representatives, the British to accept those I nominated; third, Stormont Castle was not an acceptable venue; finally, the meeting to be confined to the British representatives and our own, with one mutually acceptable third party who would not be a politician. I wanted to have a reliable witness to any terms that might be arrived at.

As our representatives I then nominated Dave O'Connell and Gerry Adams. They would be well balanced as a team. Dave, a Southerner, had a very quick mind and a precise manner. He had the necessary authority as someone prominently associated with the national leadership. Gerry, a young Belfast man with a broad outlook and a good overall thinker, was under detention in Long Kesh but had not been formally interned.

I set out these terms and entrusted them to John Hume, though I was not convinced that either the British or himself would find them very tempting. When John came back again to the Derry billet that night he reported, to the amazement of myself and everybody else, that there had been no haggling or quibbling. The terms had been accepted completely.

Within hours of publicly refusing to treat with terrorists, the British were secretly agreeing to discuss a truce with us.

It was hard to know what to make of it. It was quite possible that Whitelaw now realised he had underestimated the chances for a settlement that our proposal offered, and that he was just having second thoughts to protect his political career.

The picture in the North quickly began to change. We got Gerry Adams released from Long Kesh. We secured an immediate British announcement that political prisoners would be given political status. This applied to the UVF and other Protestant prisoners too. The hunger strikers in Crumlin Road ended their long protest, and Billy McKee was taken to hospital in weak condition.

Within a few days, one of the Belfast papers as good as said that it

was the SDLP which had won political status for the prisoners. I immediately got in touch with John Hume, informed him of the report and told him that in my view the prisoners had secured political status themselves by their courageous and determined hunger strike. John replied that this was also his view and said he would issue a statement to that effect. And to give him full credit, this is what he did.

The contacts with the British to arrange a preliminary meeting went ahead. But then a snag came up. They agreed to having this meeting at a neutral venue instead of at Stormont Castle, but they were making difficulties about my condition for a third party to be present. We got over this problem on a fairly simple basis: no witness, no meeting. That bridge was crossed, and the first talks were arranged for the following Tuesday, June 20. This was exactly one week after our first suggestion of a meeting had been turned down by Whitelaw. The place agreed on was not far from Derry.

We had to stay in Derry for a few days while the talks were being fixed up. During that week the roadblocks outside the no-go area suddenly blossomed out with poster-size pictures of me in my late disguise, complete with discarded moustache and hairstyle. The British had managed to get photographs of our press conference and made a lot of blow-ups. Whatever Whitelaw had in mind, the local British brigade commander in Derry was being kept in the dark about the truce moves, and there was no let-up in the military hunt for me.

At the agreed time on June 20, Dave and Gerry Adams went to the rendezvous outside Derry and met Whitelaw's two representatives, Philip Woodfield and Frank Steele. Both delegations produced signed credentials and proofs of identity, then got straight down to business. We had discussed in advance among ourselves the terms our representatives were to insist upon in negotiating a truce, and we had made their terms of reference clear.

Any truce would have to be bilateral, with hostilities ceasing on both sides. This meant that on the British side all harassment must also cease, with no arrests, no raiding, no searching of persons, homes or vehicles. Roadblock activity would go into low key and would quickly be phased out.

Next, within a stated period from the declaration of a truce, representatives of the Republican national leadership would meet Whitelaw and members of the British government to discuss our conditions for ending operations altogether. Dave and Gerry pressed

for such a meeting to take place within seven days of the truce going into effect, because I regarded it as important that the truce should start leading to the next stage as quickly as possible. A truce on its own would achieve nothing, and if the British wanted to drag it out without getting on to serious negotiations, that would be a very suspicious sign.

The British representatives argued for an interval of fourteen days from the beginning of the truce to the meeting with Whitelaw. It was finally agreed that the meeting should be held ten clear days after the truce went into effect, and that it would be kept secret.

In spite of the earlier British reluctance, the truce terms and points agreed to were drawn up in writing, and before the talks ended these were signed and witnessed by our third-party nominee. The delegations exchanged telephone numbers where they could be reached, and then reported back to their respective sides.

Just before the preliminary meeting broke up, the British said to Dave and Gerry, "By the way, do make sure that all booby-traps are deboobed." In all, twenty-two landmines and booby-traps were defused when the truce came into effect.

Before an exact deadline could be set for the suspension of operations, the agreement had to be formally approved by the Republican leadership. Going over the points beforehand, I spotted an omission that had a strong bearing on this. It was the matter of a public response from the British government to the truce announcement we would issue when the time came. I had insisted on this safeguard, because it would pledge their army to respect the truce as bilateral. Somehow, the point had been overlooked during the meeting. Our representative phoned and explained. He was asked to phone again in two hours. When he did, they confirmed that there would be a public response.

Accordingly, a statement was issued that Thursday on behalf of the Republican leadership. It announced that all offensive operations would be suspended from 23.59 hours on the following Monday, June 26, provided that a public reciprocal response was forthcoming from the armed forces of the British Crown.

Whitelaw very quickly made the public acknowledgement. He told the House of Commons that British forces in the North would reciprocate. We immediately issued a second statement taking this as acceptance.

And so the stage was set for negotiations between Irish Republican

leaders and the representatives of a British government for the first time since the summer of 1921.

What was likely to happen next, I knew all too well both from my own experience and from close study of resistance campaigns in other countries. When revolutionary forces had agreed to a suspension of operations, the imperialist media could never shut up and let peace take its course. They always had to play up the mischievous line that the revolutionaries had been forced to ask for a truce from a position of weakness. This could strike at our support among the population and have dangerous effects on morale in our rank and file. It might even make harder political going for us when we met the British to put our conditions for a settlement. If they had any suspicion they were dealing with weak opponents, they would take an uncompromising attitude.

I had no sooner put my mind to this than I received a number of intelligence reports which settled the matter. One of our units in the North had been carrying out a series of highly effective telephone-tapping operations which had given us a good deal of valuable information. Their latest stuff consisted of conversations between high RUC officers and senior British army personnel, which had taken place the previous week following our original truce offer. Despite all our successes, car bombs and landmines, the consensus of opinion in these intercepts was that the IRA was on its last legs and that this was why the Republican leadership had offered to talk. These officers agreed that one final combined push by the British and the RUC would finish us and roll up the entire campaign.

It was typical of the antiquated, unimaginative imperialist ideas about "dealing with rebels" that had made British policy in Ireland a continuous disaster for century after century. For eight hundred years they had been telling each other about this one last push.

There was only one way to smash the notion that the resistance had been reduced to weakness and to make sure that the units went into the truce with their morale high. We now had less than five days to go before the truce came into effect. I decided we would use them to go out with a bang.

Therefore, before the announcement from the Republican leadership and Whitelaw that Thursday, instructions were issued to all units that they were to continue in action right up to the final minute, 23.59 hours on Monday. Within hours, in a brilliant operation in the Glenshane pass in County Derry, a Saracen armoured car was

wrecked by a landmine and three British soldiers were killed. Heavy sniping attacks were carried out in Belfast, Derry and parts of Tyrone. There were other engagements all day in the cities.

A number of sabotage operations all over the North supported this intensive assault activity. In Newry a member of the RUC was shot dead and in Derry a British soldier. At 23.55 hours on Monday, five minutes before the truce deadline, a British army sergeant was shot dead in east Belfast. He belonged to a patrol moving fully armed and with fingers on triggers in the Short Strand area. At midnight all operations ceased, and on the Republican side weapons were made safe.

In the three weeks up to the ceasefire the British had suffered many more casualties than in any complete month since the campaign opened. They admitted twenty dead, including the RUC man and members of the UDR, and several dozen wounded. But, through our contacts in hospitals and intercepted documents, we knew that their admitted losses were lower than their actual casualties.

The Irish Republican resistance had demonstrated beyond any doubt to the British, to the Unionists, to our own rank and file and to the whole world that after three years in battle against imperialism the movement was as tough a fighting force as ever and was speaking from strength. My comrades and I were in no doubt as to how seriously the British regarded that strength. Our meeting with Whitelaw was to take place in secret. An imperialist government does not agree to negotiate with representatives of a revolutionary movement without good reason. The reason was the continued ability of the IRA to fight the massive British occupation forces and to bring home to the English people the hard price that must be paid for the foolishness of propping up a colonial system which could not survive.

Chapter 16

Truce

Just before the truce I left Derry and went south. I would have a chance to spend a little time with my family again when the fighting really stopped. But the next four days and all the weekend were filled with meetings with the Republican HQ staff and the commanders of the Southern units to brief everyone on the truce arrangements. After these briefings I returned north, crossed the border and arrived in Belfast around midday on Monday, June 26, about twelve hours before the agreed deadline for the suspension of military operations.

I had issued a seven-point instruction about the truce to all units in the North, but in the case of the Belfast brigade I decided that I would convey this to each volunteer in person. I began an inspection of every unit in the city area which took about two days. The cessation of fighting provided the opportunity to parade the 1st and 2nd Battalions in full strength. The 3rd Battalion had three separate indoor turnouts in the Ardoyne, Ballymacarret and a mixed Nationalist-Unionist area where it was not known that we had a company and special precautions were still in force. In each case the battalion OC introduced me, and I made an address congratulating the volunteers on the great struggle they had fought. I told them they were an outstanding example to revolutionary fighters, not only in Ireland but all over the world.

Throughout the city in those first days of the truce, people relaxed. After the strain the Belfast members of the movement had been through for three years, it would have been understandable if they had felt like doing the same. But that was not how they felt at all. I saw few signs of premature celebration. Instead, the units had a

quiet air of confidence. It was a time of hope, but still too early to start taking things for granted.

Séamus Twomey and I took the opportunities which the Belfast parades gave us to confirm to the volunteers that there would be no sell-out and no watering-down of our demands. If the British refused our proposals when negotiations began, the truce would end and the campaign would be resumed. The high spirit and morale of the Northern units was obvious.

After the casualties the British had taken in those three weeks, they had a very poor chance of getting anybody to believe that the IRA had suggested peace talks out of weakness. They tried another line of psychological attack instead. Various newspapers began to hint that the truce had caused dissension in Republican ranks. A bogus statement purporting to come from a Belfast unit was issued to the press, denouncing the truce as "a sell-out" and calling for an IRA convention. This statement was repudiated by the Belfast staff as an attempt to create confusion.

However, the cleverness of the counter-insurgency propaganda experts did not get the British far that summer, because many sections of the press made the mistake of taking the public for fools. At the end of May the propaganda line was that the Republican leadership was in danger of losing the support of the Nationalist population, particularly in the no-go areas, unless it gave in to the "peace at any price" groups and called off the campaign. At the end of June the line was that the leadership was in danger of losing support among the same population because the truce had made Nationalists feel betrayed. It didn't seem to matter how much this kind of propaganda contradicted itself from one week to the next as long as the angle intended to cause the damage was plugged hard, that the IRA and the Nationalist population were at loggerheads. The SDLP politicians were being shoved forward as the logical spokesmen for the Nationalist people. This was obviously yet another contradiction, because if Nationalists were supposed to resent the Republicans for calling the truce why would they support politicians who said they were against violence? Nevertheless, this was the kind of nonsense that filled the papers and the television screens and was swallowed in Britain and the South, with hardly a voice raised to point out how utterly ridiculous the establishment propaganda racket had become.

Of the international media covering the conflict, the Swedish

reporters were among the most sympathetic. American correspondents seemed to be understanding up to a point, and German and other continental television teams gave fair treatment to the Republican side. We noticed that, with some exceptions, foreign reporters based in London were more inclined to accept the British line than the ones who arrived in Ireland straight from abroad. A few journalists of the Radio Telefis Eireann network in the South tried to report fairly. But that service is a government monopoly which the station officials ran like tame civil servants, taking orders openly given by Lynch and his ministers. We detected a hostile trend in RTE early on in the campaign, and this increased until spokesmen for the Republican movement were prevented from appearing on the Southern stations at all.

But no matter what efforts were made to confuse them, both the Republican movement and the Nationalist population could see for themselves that the local units had confidence in the leadership, and all held fast to see what would come out of the truce.

Naturally the truce was welcomed by politicians of all breeds except the Unionists, or the splinter groups they had split into. Craig said the truce was of no interest to him whatever. Paisley's party said our proposals were no more than another ultimatum, and no more acceptable than those in the past. But Roy Bradford, a former Unionist minister, said that the IRA had softened up the British government, which was now ready to accept what it had refused twelve months earlier. Faulkner got into a heated dispute with a BBC interviewer when he said there should be no talks with terrorists, as he called the Republican freedom fighters.

Churchmen of every denomination came out in favour of the truce, as did a great many non-Unionist politicians, some more cautiously than others. In the North, these politicians' interests were quite clear. The old Stormont had finished up like Humpty-Dumpty. It had had a great fall, and all the queen's men could never put it back. It was the IRA, and nobody else, who had smashed it. The politicians who lost their jobs were hoping now that the truce would lead to peace, and that peace would lead to the setting-up of some new Northern assembly. Then they could get into the picture again as part of the *status quo*.

After a week of truce, the British still had not informed us of any arrangements for the meeting with Whitelaw, which according to the

agreement was to take place within ten days of operations being suspended. Our representatives were instructed to call them on the hot-line and insist that they keep to the bargain. We required to know the time and place they had in mind.

They started off by asking for a few more days. Our representatives demanded that they stick to the agreement. As the truce became effective at midnight on June 26, the meeting should therefore be held by Thursday, July 6. The British, however, claimed that the proviso of "ten clear days" entitled them to calculate from the *second* day of truce. This extended the deadline for the meeting to Friday, July 7. It was a petty attempt to win a pre-negotiation point, but we agreed on this date to avoid a further excuse for stalling.

The British representatives proposed that the meeting should be held in London. I didn't care where it was held. All I wanted was to see what would come out of it.

I had not seen my family for weeks, and I crossed the border again to spend a few hours with them. It was the first time I was able to sleep at home that year. Mary and I discussed the truce and the prospects for the talks. She shared my feeling that we should not be too optimistic. But there was too much on my mind to give my little daughter Sinéad, who was elated at seeing me again, all the time she would have liked.

Although the first few days of the truce had gone well, people were not given the chance to feel good about it for long. Republican units had carried out their instructions fully and no breaches of discipline were reported to me. On the British side, arrests and raiding of homes had ceased. Most of their roadblocks were removed altogether, and the rest went into low profile. If an armoured car was used as a block, it was pulled in beside the road instead of aggressively out across it as before.

Within a further day or two, however, we received reports that roadblocks had gone up again and vehicles were being stopped and searched. These new blocks were manned solely by members of the Ulster Defence Regiment. This of course was a glaring violation of the truce agreement. Though the UDR was a part-time militia it was explicitly under British command and as much General Tuzo's responsibility as any regular regiment. Our representatives were instructed to get on the hot-line and lay a formal protest.

This was always easier said than done. Only nominated people

could contact the British representatives, who rigidly adhered to the procedure. It was the old problem of security versus good lines of communication, and this inability to raise the right official at the right time on their part was to lead to disaster in the end. However, on this occasion when they finally came to the phone they were quite evasive about the UDR's breach of the truce. This was a strange attitude of official laxness by senior British officers. We began to wonder about the sincerity of this truce on their side. Maybe after all they *were* only using it to ensure an easier time for themselves during the tricky July 12 period.

In some cases, after long drawn-out delays the offending road-blocks were withdrawn. But elsewhere they would vanish from one road only to reappear on another. We decided that for the time being we would just note this defiance of the truce agreement and bring it up when we met Whitelaw himself.

Before the opportunity arose, even more flagrant provocation was reported from South Derry. There two Republicans in a car were stopped and detained at an illegal roadblock. The armed men who held them up did not belong to any military formation, but proved to be members of the Loyalist Ulster Defence Association. They were still openly carrying weapons when a joint patrol of police and military troops arrived and stood around chatting on first-name terms with them. The police took the two lads away, gave them a rough time and released them next day with a warning that they were lucky to escape with their lives.

The UDA and other Protestant extremists showed a wildly uncompromising attitude to the truce. Even a week's peace didn't seem to be acceptable to them. The hopes that had been raised were quickly dashed by an upsurge in sectarian activity. The UDA demanded the elimination of the Nationalist no-go areas, and in the hope of forcing the British to undertake such action, they had begun to organise the barricading of some Protestant districts as rival no-go zones.

But the real purpose of these barricades was not just to keep British soldiers out of Protestant areas. Such a claim would have been sheer rubbish, for example, in the Belfast district of Woodvale, where two of the most senior British officers in the North did a deal for mixed army-UDA patrols. They were Boswell, the brigadier in charge in Belfast, and Ford, the major-general commanding land forces, who had been in charge of British troops on Bloody Sunday. The

barricades had at least two other reasons. They provided a power base for the UDA, who emerged during the truce with more confidence than before, to show themselves in paramilitary uniform, paint impressive signs like "G Coy HQ" on huts and vehicles, and give orders to all and sundry. And it was from some of these blocks that murder squads went out and victims were picked up.

Towards the end of that first week we were getting anguished complaints from all over the place about the sharp rise in what the police and the press called "apparently motiveless murders." These were sectarian assassinations, which reached a terrible wave of savagery during the truce and mounted to almost two hundred by the end of the following year. Certainly, as has now been well established, most were the work of Protestant extremists, enraged by the prospect of a British government deal with Republicans (for even though the meeting with Whitelaw was to be in secret, everybody knew that the truce must logically lead to some kind of talks). The more simple-minded assassins took it out on the handiest Catholic targets. But other street killings showed signs of a more deliberate and sophisticated effort to inflame community against community. In the circumstances the immediate objective could only be to wreck the truce, and the negotiations with it.

Our suspicions were confirmed afterwards when the UDA defector David Fogal, who was in charge of their organisation in Woodvale, ran out on them to England. Fogal admitted that the feeling of most of the UDA council about the truce was that "the quicker it broke, the better." So there can be no doubt about the motive behind some of the so-called "motiveless" murders during the truce period. It was to provoke a renewal of the fighting between the British and the IRA, this time in the hope that the Republican threat to Unionist domination would be wiped out for ever.

However, it soon became apparent that somebody else besides the UDA wanted to sabotage the truce and block any negotiations. Even before operations were suspended, there had been assassinations and attempted killings, in both Catholic and Protestant districts, which really did seem to be motiveless. But two cases in particular put some of these unexplained shootings in a very different light.

The first happened in a Protestant stronghold in Belfast. At the end of May, local people managed to stop a car getting away after it had opened fire on a group of men in Silvio Street, off the Shankill Road. The crowd dragged three men out of the car. They were in

civilian clothes and armed. Their weapons were taken from them. When they were further searched, one of them proved to have a military identity card and a British army radio was found in the car. The angry Protestants beat the three men senseless, and probably it was only the arrival of troops at that moment that saved their lives. The soldiers took the men away before the district RUC could deal with the matter, and no more was officially heard of it.

On June 22 it was the turn of a Catholic area when four men were machine-gunned without warning from a passing car in Glen Road, Andersonstown. Three of them were taxi-drivers, and all were seriously wounded. The weapon used was a Thompson. This time the RUC did become involved in the incident, and charges were brought. Captain James McGregor of the Parachute Regiment and Sergeant Clive Williams, whose unit was not given, were accused of unlawfully possessing the Thompson and ammunition. This type of weapon is no longer a regular British issue, but people in Belfast would associate it with the IRA. Williams was also accused of attempted murder and malicious wounding.

Charges against McGregor and Williams were dropped and Williams was acquitted but later admitted that he had been operating as a member of the Military Reconnaissance Force, a plain-clothes undercover organisation attached to the 39th infantry brigade. Not many people had heard of the MRF, but it fitted in with the theories of a certain officer who had commanded the brigade up to a few weeks previously. He was none other than Kitson. The charges concerning the Thompson and ammunition were suddenly dropped and Williams was acquitted on the others, so that both men went free.

The truth about this case did not come out for a full year after the truce, and until the facts were known about this and several other mysterious shootings they were blamed on Irishmen of both communities. Although uniformed British troops had orders to observe the truce, throughout the entire period these army plain-clothes squads continued to prowl around the streets in civilian cars on their undercover business. People who had been terrorised by them later gave tips which helped to identify their cars when they entered a district on night operations. One thing that often gave them away was their extra-powerful lights for picking out targets.

All in all, there was never an uneasier truce. First, the Ulster Defence Association clearly wanted to wreck it. Second, as we have seen in the case of the mixed army-UDA patrols, there was collusion

between UDA inner council members and senior British officers. Third, besides the real sectarian assassinations, there were other killings and shootings intended to keep *both* communities angry.

If we were going to get any advantage out of a truce that might break down at any moment, I realised it was desperately important to make use of every single minute of breathing-time, and to avoid any delays or shilly-shallying either on the British side or our own.

Despite my preparations for fuller talks with the British there was one vital task to be taken care of beforehand. This was the publication of a policy document setting out the Republican movement's proposals for regional government throughout Ireland. I wanted to get our political proposals circulated as widely as possible during the truce, so that people everywhere could make up their own minds about the propaganda claims that the entire Provisional Republican movement consisted of mindless bombers and those obsessed with physical force. We had a quarter of a million copies printed in English and thirty thousand in Irish. *Eire Nua* was launched at a news conference which Dave O'Connell chaired in Dublin, and it created enormous interest. I had wanted to get the whole thing out much earlier, but there had been some intolerable delays in preparing it for the printers. Now these worked to our advantage, and some of our opponents were convinced that we had pulled an excellent stroke of timing.

In distributing the manifesto, we gave heavy priority to the Northern areas. There it acted as a tonic to thousands who realised that Republicanism could indeed present a constructive political way forward. We also sent copies to embassies and foreign governments to let them compare our real political philosophy with the crude, sub-human image of the movement which the British have always applied to anti-colonial liberation movements as a matter of course.

The time now came to pick our team of representatives for the crucial London meeting with Whitelaw. At this stage, it was the military situation that would be the main British preoccupation, and they would scarcely be interested in talking to any Republicans just yet apart from representatives of the military wing. Therefore I rejected a suggestion that our team should include a leading member of Sinn Féin. If the British honestly wanted to negotiate, there would be plenty of real political work at the next stage, when both

sides would bring on their political specialists to deal with the detailed problems. On the other hand, if they were not sincerely considering a settlement, then we would be doing well to keep Sinn Féin away from any responsibility for the truce collapsing.

It was decided that Dave O'Connell and I would represent the national leadership, together with Séamus Twomey. Also from Belfast there would be Gerry Adams and Ivor Bell. Martin McGuinness was to represent Derry.

Over the next couple of days I arranged a series of meetings with trade union officials, lawyers, a senior counsel and various other people with international experience in conferences and negotiations. I found the insights of the people I talked to deeply interesting, and they put me wise to a few of the more subtle tricks which they thought might be tried in London.

In between, I was able to snatch a little time to see my family again. On Thursday, July 6, Dave O'Connell and I set off once more for Derry. We had now reached the ludicrous situation where it was necessary for us to pay more attention to our personal security in the Free State than in the North. We were still technically wanted in the South by an Irish regime! The feedback we got was that we would not be arrested if we kept a low profile. But whoever it was that first called Prime Minister Lynch's policy "ambiguous" was greatly understating it. Dave and I played safe and moved up to Derry as inconspicuously as possible.

On Friday morning, July 7, we were to have been picked up at eight o'clock by two cars. They were to take us out of Derry to our rendezvous with the British, which had been arranged for half-past eight. As happens often enough in the Republican movement, one car had broken down. All six delegates had to pile unceremoniously into the other with the driver.

On the way I learned that two British army captains had penetrated into Free Derry during the night and had been detained by our volunteers. They were in civilian clothes and said they had been at a party. Instructions were given that they were to be held until our return, when a decision would be made what to do about them.

We arrived at the rendezvous five minutes late and in a somewhat squashed condition. When we got out of the car, Frank Steele from Whitelaw's office was waiting. He immediately brought up the question of the two officers. We told him they were of no great

importance compared with the London meeting, and that we would deal with the matter when we got back.

"Well, the brigadier is expecting to hear where they can be picked up," Steele said. "If they're not released he might be inclined to send in troops to look for them."

To send troops into Free Derry would need a much bigger political green light than any he was likely to get just then. When Steele saw that we were not going to budge on this issue he reluctantly left it at that.

We climbed into a minibus the British had provided. It had brown paper pinned up over the windows. The driver was clearly a British officer in mufti. He was carrying a weapon. I could see the bulge under his armpit.

Whether he guessed it or not, two of our own party were also armed. Before leaving Free Derry, I had taken the precaution to put a .38 Cobra Special revolver in a shoulder holster against a number of contingencies that might well arise. Despite our safe conduct guarantees, there could have been an intelligence leak. I wondered what the young officer at the wheel would do if an assassination squad did try to ambush us. Somehow, I didn't think he would fight to the death to protect us Republicans.

Out in the country our silent driver pulled up by a gate into a field, and a helicopter came down right beside it. We transferred to it quickly, accompanied by Steele. The machine lifted off immediately and flew right across the lough, across the Derry countryside and over the mountains towards Belfast. It was a glorious summer morning and I could see for miles. I was taking particular notice of how a helicopter can observe movement and markings on the ground, and of its general effectiveness for observation work.

When we arrived over the RAF airfield at Aldergrove, we got a radio report that the plane which was to take us to London hadn't come in yet. We flew round and round for another twenty minutes or so until the plane landed. Then the helicopter descended and put us down a hundred yards from it.

A wing-commander was standing rigidly to attention near the plane. I imagine he was the officer in charge of RAF Aldergrove. This tickled me immensely, considering the identity of the VIPs he was seeing off this time.

We didn't do a great amount of talking on the flight over. Most of us were preoccupied with our own thoughts. We were all very aware

of the historic significance of our journey, for it was the first time in half a century that representatives of the Irish resistance and of the British government were meeting in formal talks. But what concerned us more were the practical problems that had to be tackled that day.

We landed in England at Benson RAF station in Oxfordshire. Two very large limousines with Special Branch drivers were waiting for us. We headed for London, making one stop for a phone call in Staines to the secretary we had arranged to have with us for delegation work.

Our destination turned out to be a private house overlooking the Thames near Chelsea Bridge. It belonged to Whitelaw's junior minister, Paul Channon. We were guided upstairs to a very spacious carpeted room. A massive library of books filled an entire wall. The furniture was valuable and antique, but I would have been far more impressed had there been any signs of businesslike preparations for a conference. There were none, no proper working table, no paper for notes, not even the elementary civility of a jug of water.

We were on our feet chatting when the door opened and Whitelaw came in. With him were Channon, Steele and Woodfield. Whitelaw came straight over and offered me his hand as we were introduced. "Oh, Mr MacStiofáin. How do you do?" He pronounced my name in Irish perfectly. Sure enough, he had also done some homework before the meeting. His manner was cordial, as if he were greeting business acquaintances. When the introductions were completed, Whitelaw said innocently to Dave, "Perhaps you'd like to sit next to me, Mr O'Connell."

And of course Dave declined. I said that our delegation would sit together. I saw some of the British representatives look at each other sharply. I am not sure how they had expected we would conduct ourselves.

"Oh, very well," said Whitelaw. "As you wish." We declined drinks, but though we could have done with a glass of water on that hot day, we were not offered any, and nobody asked for it.

Whitelaw proposed that he himself would begin. I watched him carefully as he spoke. He looked exactly the same as he did on television, smooth, well-fed and fleshy. He spoke for five minutes telling us what he wanted to do for "the people of Northern Ireland." It was the same kind of stuff he came out with in his public appearances. It was not a promising start for a serious negotiating session.

"Now perhaps I've said enough for the time being," Whitelaw concluded, looking at us. In fact, in practical terms he had not said anything at all.

I waited a moment in case he had any afterthoughts. Then I said, "I have a statement from the Republican leadership that I propose to read."

"Please do," he replied.

I read at dictation speed. Whitelaw used those notes when he reported our demands to the House of Commons a week later:

The House may be interested to know what these demands were. [He told the House.] They called on the British government to recognise publicly that it is the right of the people of Ireland acting as a unit to decide the future of Ireland.

They called on the British government to declare its intention to withdraw all British forces from Irish soil, such withdrawal to be completed on or before the first day of January 1975. Pending such withdrawal the British forces must be withdrawn immediately from sensitive areas.

They called for a general amnesty for all political prisoners in Irish and British jails, for all internees and detainees and for all persons on the wanted list. In this regard they recorded their dissatisfaction that internment has not ended in response to their initiative in declaring a suspension of offensive operations.

My reading the proposals out to the note-taker prevented any of the usual stalling suggestions we might otherwise expect, such as meeting again in a week's time "when you've got all this committed to paper." Before the meeting ended, I also gave the note-taker a copy of the document itself.

We were therefore able to move straight on to a general discussion of points arising from the document. Every member of the Republican delegation spoke, though I probably did about seventy per cent of the talking on our side and Whitelaw ninety per cent on theirs.

There were only two real clashes during the meeting. In the first, Whitelaw said blandly that British troops would never open fire on unarmed civilians. I find it hard to believe that he thought that for a moment. Martin McGuinness looked at me indignantly for a go-ahead, and I nodded, knowing what was coming. He told

Whitelaw promptly and forcefully that British troops had certainly shot unarmed people on Bloody Sunday. I also had to point out that they had done so on several other occasions, and that it was ridiculous to claim otherwise. There were the cases of Séamus Cusack and Desmond Beattie in Derry, the deaf mute in Strabane, and many others. These British shootings were almost invariably followed by efforts to prove that the civilian victims had been carrying arms, thus giving rise to what came to be called the excuse of the "posthumous terrorist."

Our second difference concerned all-Ireland elections to determine the will of the entire population. Whitelaw brought up the familiar objection that the British government had several times given "constitutional guarantees to the majority in Northern Ireland." I said that it was the Ireland Act of 1949, passed in the British House of Commons, which guaranteed that constitutional position. There was no act of parliament that could not be set aside by another.

"You are only stating a fact of parliamentary life," Whitelaw remarked acidly, seeming to expect that this would pull the rug from under us.

But I replied that it was nevertheless still a fact. These guarantees were not insurmountable problems. All that was required to remove them was a simple majority in the same House of Commons.

Whitelaw had wanted to meet us in secret, and we were willing to deal in secret. Because we understood that he would have to win support for an agreement from the far Right of his party, we would have been satisfied at that stage with a secret memorandum on these lines, witnessed by and entrusted to a person of international standing. We suggested the Secretary-General of the United Nations.

This provoked a significant exchange of glances between Whitelaw and Channon, and immediately afterwards they requested a break. They could not have been surprised that our opening position had been a firm presentation of the known Republican objectives, but we had let them see that it was not our aim to make things politically impossible for them. We had informed Whitelaw that we were willing to agree to delaying any public announcement of an acceptance of our proposals. The date for that could be the subject of negotiation at further meetings, and I would have been in favour of waiting a number of months once the proposals were accepted. Similarly, we would also have been prepared to negotiate the actual timing of a British military withdrawal. We would not have complained about

extending the completion of withdrawal by a year to 1976. This would have given the British three and a half years to arrange an orderly withdrawal of their forces from the North. That period would have compared very well with the periods for similar British withdrawals from the former overseas colonies, and was in fact far longer than the twelve months in which they evacuated the South following the negotiations of 1921.

All of us knew that while Whitelaw might be the overlord who ran the North by one-man rule, here in London he was only the go-between and would have to refer our proposals to the British Cabinet. When the two sides reassembled after the break, this of course was what happened. Whitelaw said there was difficulty regarding the constitutional guarantees, but the rest of our proposals could be considered as a whole. He would have to refer it all to his Cabinet.

After some more discussion, we asked for another break. I wanted us to decide among ourselves how long we should give the British on this. It would not be long before their parliament adjourned for the summer recess. This was Friday. We had a good idea that there would be a meeting of the Cabinet on the Thursday of the following week. We should try to get a deadline for the British reply that would be long enough to include that meeting, but not long enough to let them play us along until the next. We would open the bidding at three days and take it up bit by bit.

When the British returned the second time I said to Whitelaw, "We have discussed our proposals during the break, and we require an answer to them by next Monday." That led to hard bargaining, but we finally dug our heels in at one week. This was time enough to include the next Cabinet meeting.

Before our discussion ended, we impressed on him that we were anxious to secure a peace agreement. We proposed that twenty-four hours' notice of intention should be given by either side before breaking the truce. Whereas our original offer had been to suspend operations for seven days, the truce was now to be open-ended.

"Oh, we shall not break it," Whitelaw said. "If it does break, it will be your people who break it." But we insisted on a proper understanding about notice, reminding him that the Ulster Defence Regiment had already violated the truce agreement by re-introducing roadblocks and searches. Finally he reluctantly agreed.

Whitelaw asked us to accept that further contact between us would be left to what he called "the officials," meaning Steele and

Woodfield. Lastly, he asked for an assurance that we would not disclose that this meeting had taken place. I said we would keep it confidential as long as it was not contrary to the interests of the Republican movement to do so.

With that, the meeting terminated. We came out of Channon's house and were driven back to the same RAF airfield in the same conspicuous limousines that had brought us. After all the emphasis on secrecy and security, this didn't strike me as the best way of preserving it, but I said nothing.

In the car I thought over our first dealings with Whitelaw. In some ways he had turned out to be smarter than he appeared to be on television. But in others he was very artificial. His political career was supposed to have been built up on his social charm and his ability to get along with people. But once he understood he was dealing with a very determined delegation completely united on a solid policy, he wasted no time on that kind of thing. He said of me in a newspaper interview later that I had stark, staring eyes which would literally terrorise a person. But I would say that on balance I terrorised him about as much as he charmed me.

On the flight going back, Steele was indiscreet enough to confide in us something of their real outlook about deaths in the North. The atmosphere in the aircraft was very different from what it had been that morning. Coming over, it had been very formal, if not frigid. This time Steele came into our compartment and sat with us.

A meal was served, and Steele opened up conversation during it. I remember saying quietly to Séamus Twomey, "Listen very carefully to this guy. What we're getting off the cuff is as valuable as anything at the meeting."

"I hope you're not going to start your bloody stupid campaign again," Steele said, or words to that effect.

Well, the truce was there, we replied.

Steele was all assurances that the British would not break the agreement. But then he passed a remark which I thought was typical of the establishment's attitude towards their own soldiers. "Don't think you're worrying us with the casualties you're causing our troops at the moment," he said. "We lose more men through road accidents in Germany in any one year than the losses you fellows are inflicting on us."

I asked him if more than twenty British soldiers had been killed on the German roads in the previous three weeks.

"You know what I mean," he said. "We're not unduly worried."

I thought it was altogether amazing to have in the North a senior official so poorly briefed on the background to the situation in the country, especially when his own office was responsible for overall policy under direct rule.

When we arrived back in Derry that evening we immediately went to arrange the release of the two British officers who had been detained that morning, only to find that they had been let go about an hour before our return. We had regarded them as insurance while we were away and I was not at all pleased with the action of the people concerned in freeing them. The British were also not pleased, either with us or the two captains. When they got them back they court-martialled them.

As long as the truce held, there was still a possibility that we could also negotiate with the Protestants. Stand-by arrangements already existed for convening a conference of Irish organisations of all politics and denominations actively involved in the situation in the North. We knew, of course, that without meaningful Protestant participation such a conference would be worthless. From our meetings the previous December to November the following year I and other members of the Republican leadership had spent a great deal of time talking with Protestant representatives, both lay and clerical. Many of them were astute enough to realise that some form of united Ireland, as they put it, was inevitable.

Immediately I returned from London I put my mind to the question of this Northern conference. If Heath and Whitelaw saw we were making the slightest headway, they would be tempted to hold their hand on an outright rejection of the London proposals. That would help to keep the truce open. And the longer the truce held, the more it would produce the atmosphere and conditions that would make it possible for the Protestants to meet us in neutrally convened talks.

Within hours, the assassinations in the North ruined all that. During the London meeting Whitelaw had given us a categorical assurance that the British would crack down straightaway on those who were carrying out sectarian killings and do everything possible to bring them to an end. But by that Friday night people's nerves had been strained to near breaking-point. The British were letting the UDA put up barricades in parts of Belfast, but bulldozing Catholic ones in Portadown. Tension rose in Derry, too. There was talk of a Protestant rising, though this could be read as pressure to force the

British to abandon all dealings with Republicans. In Belfast the British broke the truce terms again by arresting two volunteers. By the weekend the number of assassinations since the truce had grown to eighteen. The most dreadful of all came a couple of days later on the morning of July 12 when a Catholic widow in the Oldpark area of Belfast was raped and shot three times after her mentally retarded son was murdered in front of her eyes. He was only fifteen. Though left for dead herself, the unfortunate woman recovered to convict the murderers.

British sources have since admitted that we did our utmost to honour the truce. They acknowledged that, during the earlier one in March, Séamus Twomey had seen to it that not a single shot was fired or a single bomb exploded by Republican units. And on this occasion too they conceded that we had "policed it competently." But despite our efforts, Belfast was boiling up.

When the two volunteers were arrested, one of Whitelaw's representatives was contacted at once on the hot-line. Discussions continued throughout Saturday and Sunday to get them released and take the heat out of the Belfast situation, but to no avail.

The Ulster Defence Association had involved itself in a housing dispute on an estate at Lenadoon in west Belfast. A few Catholic families who had lost their homes in the conflict or had been forced to move by intimidation were allocated empty houses on the estate, which was a mixed one. The UDA brought reinforcements into Lenadoon from outside areas, then informed the British army in the area that if the Catholic families moved into the houses assigned to them they would be burned out.

The British lieutenant-colonel in charge gave in to the UDA threats and overrode the ruling of the civilian authority, the Northern Ireland Housing Executive. He told the families it was up to him to decide whether they could take possession of their houses, and then put forward his own proposals for altering rehousing policy in Belfast. There was no longer any pretence that the British army was in Belfast "in support of the civil power." It was telling the civil power what to do.

A growing crowd of Catholics gathered in Lenadoon, demanding that the families be allowed to enter their lawful homes. The British reaction was to move into the estate in force. Between half-past three and four pm on Sunday many armoured cars, armoured personnel carriers and extra troops arrived. The situation gradually turned explosive.

I was due in Dublin that afternoon and was already on my way south when the final crisis arose. I stopped and made phone calls to keep in touch with the situation, asking Belfast to send a courier to reach Dublin ahead of me with the latest assessments.

Our representatives and outside mediators tried the hot-line and other channels to the limit. But, as usual with British politicians, the sacred country weekend was more important than peace or war. Heath could not be contacted at all and Whitelaw was out walking or something in Cumberland. Late in the afternoon one of Whitelaw's representatives was raised. His response made it plain that the British had already written off the truce. "Oh, well, it's a pity it's going to break," he said lazily. "Perhaps we'll see you sometime."

That was the final straw. The soldiers at Lenadoon were now carrying clubs as well as their usual weapons. People and cars were stopped everywhere and roughly searched. Many British soldiers had disliked the truce, feeling that they lost face by failing to defeat the IRA. Now they were coming back into their element again, giving orders and eager to show the Irish who was boss. The UDA stood behind the soldiers, jeering at the protesting Catholics. Some were openly carrying pistols.

The Lenadoon situation blew up when a lorry containing the furniture of some of the families began to move. Immediately a ten-ton British armoured car ran forward and rammed it. That brutal, stupid attack by the heavy vehicle seemed to sum up the whole British military mind in the North, the same kind of mind that had led to the Bloody Sunday massacre by the paratroopers in Derry. But millions of television viewers throughout the world were able to see what happened for themselves. They saw the target of the huge armoured car, a few sticks of working-class people's furniture. It was the feeling of 1969 all over again, the anger of a people who have been pushed about for too long, and the fierce determination that their oppressors were not going to get away with it. Inevitably, rioting broke out.

Catholics in Belfast bitterly abused and reproached Republican units for our last-minute efforts to rescue the truce by negotiation. By the time I reached Dublin, around five pm, the courier's dispatch was already out-dated by events. It was another hour before one of our representatives managed to get hold of Whitelaw in Cumberland. He promised to look into the crisis, but nothing further was heard from him.

The Republican leadership in Belfast knew it could not hold back any longer. It lived up to its responsibility. Weapons put in store during the truce were re-issued, and units moved into position to protect Nationalist civilians in Lenadoon and elsewhere. There was no option. If our units had been ordered to stand aside, the consequences would have been disastrous. The IRA would have lost the defence initiative and all credibility with the people.

Angrily, but with a heavy heart, I accepted that it must begin again. Belfast could not be left to fight alone. I conferred with other members of the Republican leadership, and shortly before seven o'clock that Sunday evening we announced the termination of the truce. Instructions were sent out to all areas to resume operations at once.

An hour or so later, a newspaperman asked me what would happen now. "The campaign will be resumed with the utmost ferocity and ruthlessness," I told him.

It was. Before midnight the Derry unit carried out four sabotage operations. On July 9, 1972, after thirteen days of truce and hope the North was at war once more. The British had made no attempt to use the possibilities of that breathing space on any level except the London talks.

Whitelaw later told the House of Commons that the cost of our visit to London was five hundred and forty pounds. The treachery of that broken truce was to cost both Britain and Ireland infinitely more.

Chapter 17

Resumption

So that was that. The truce had gone, and a lot of hopes with it. I was glad to have had that few hours at home with Mary and the girls. That Sunday night I went undercover again, back to the life of temporary billets and safe houses, of disguises and winding back roads. I resigned myself to what would probably be a long struggle. The end of the truce was worst of all for the lads in Long Kesh and the political prisoners in the jails. After what they had suffered, to see the prospect of release coming close and then being snatched away again must have been a cruel frustration for them.

As usual, the people of Belfast bore the brunt of the struggle. Within a day the British shot six civilians dead. In Ballymurphy a boy and a girl of thirteen were among their victims. As the boy lay dying in the road an elderly priest went out to him and was shot down as well. The UDA and other armed Protestant extremists joined in behind the troops in attacking Nationalist areas, and many Catholic women and children fled to the South as refugees.

During the rest of July another thirteen Catholics were assassinated. Young criminals and hooligans of the Loyalist "Tartan gangs" were a further danger to innocent people, and in several well documented cases those kidnapped were sadistically tortured before being murdered. Some were branded with red-hot pokers or hacked with innumerable knife cuts. There were more than a hundred and fifty knife wounds on the body of a middle-aged factory guard found shortly afterwards.

Only a fortnight previously, people in Belfast had been going out to public houses and restaurants to celebrate the beginning of the truce. In streets like these where the UDA was strong, they were now

celebrating the breaking of it. My mind went back to the first day we had offered a truce in June, the same day that Whitelaw met the masked council members of the UDA. He had underestimated them, and the British assumed they would have no difficulty containing the UDA. No doubt they could have done so, if the UDA had used whatever strength it had at its disposal in a military confrontation. But it didn't. The British miscalculated the whole Protestant strategy.

There have been several convenient explanations of the Loyalist outbreaks which led to the wrecking of the truce. One is that Protestants started to panic and took to the streets because they feared that the British were about to make a peace settlement which would "hand them over" to a united Ireland, but the "panic" began *before* our secret London talks, *before* there were any negotiations at all. It was deliberately promoted and engineered.

To whose benefit? The answer is, the Unionist politicians. Their parliamentary power base had been kicked away with the fall of Stormont and the imposition of direct rule from England. The truce gave them their first opportunity to show the British that they still had power at their command. It was in the streets.

The Unionists simply took a leaf out of the IRA's own book. Just as one of our motives in both truces had been to demonstrate that the Republican resistance was united and under the control of its leadership, the Unionist politicians set out to create a similar impression regarding the UDA. Craig was one of the few to make open threats at Vanguard rallies where fascist-type salutes were given. The other politicians publicly condemned IRA activity, soft-pedalled on UDA violence, and used the armed Protestant organisations in secret to face London with a show of force.

There were several different armed organisations then operating in the Protestant areas, not counting the Tartan gangs and various freelance groups. Most of them had links with the Unionist political hawks. These were either through the Ulster Loyalist Council of which Craig was chairman, or on the side. Means were readily available for agitating the Protestant districts and spreading the rumour that the British were preparing a double-cross.

Whitelaw was caught napping by the uproar that this agitation produced. The Unionists' game was to cause the maximum of trouble during the truce, so that London's attention would suddenly be switched from us to them. The UDA came out onto the streets. Their

"I" Company in west Belfast provoked the Lenadoon crisis. The assassinations increased. Armed Protestants seized vehicles for barricades. They announced that they would set up more no-go areas of their own unless the British agreed to invade and reoccupy the Nationalist ones.

In a few days the Unionist politicians had recovered a great deal of the ground they had lost when Stormont fell. Most of them did not have the courage or honesty to acknowledge that it was the UDA that had won it back for them. But they were not in a position to disown their armed extremists either. It was a fantastic position to be in. They were trying to convince the British public that their one aim in life was to stamp out violence, while making it clear to the British government that they were ready to use it themselves.

Their threats worked, just as in 1912. The British gave way to the Unionists. The truce was wiped out in volleys of rubber bullets and clouds of CS gas at Lenadoon, and we were back to square one.

Almost the first British move was a psychological warfare offensive. Its objective was to shift the blame for the breaking of the truce to the IRA. It was similar to the propaganda operation they had used to shift the blame from the paratroopers to the victims on Bloody Sunday. But this time it was even more intensive.

Churchmen, politicians and newspapers joined the British in condemning the IRA, and there were several personal attacks on me. An SDLP spokesman said that the Republican leadership had muffed up the chances his party had secured for us of obtaining peace. This was typical of the impertinent kind of claim which the SDLP was to make more and more in the coming months as they manoeuvred to draw Nationalist support to themselves.

It was with considerable anger though not surprise that we learned what Whitelaw had told the House of Commons. As soon as fighting started again, he came under severe criticism from Powell and other right-wing elements, both in England and the North, for admitting that he had met us. He covered himself by saying, "They made demands that I could not accept but that I agreed to consider lest some peaceful way forward might be found." I was more thankful than ever that I had insisted on having a third party and seeing that notes of agreed points were signed and witnessed wherever possible. Otherwise what was said at the preliminary meeting might have been twisted against us too.

The obvious Republican strategy on resuming operations was to go on to the offensive immediately and to re-establish a strong IRA presence throughout the North. This pulled the attention of the British back from the Unionist blackmail move with the UDA, reminding them that the IRA remained the hard central factor in the whole Northern situation. The feeling was that if the offensive could be maintained in sufficient strength it could lead to renewed contact regarding a solution, not necessarily of the same type as had just been tried. Talks with the British government through agreed intermediaries or an "honest broker" while hostilities continued would be acceptable, provided that a written guarantee of a constructive offer in the context of our proposals was made. A similar arrangement through intermediaries in Switzerland had been employed in the French-Algerian conflict.

An offensive strategy was also intended to show that the movement had in no way lost heart for the struggle, and was just as formidable coming back into action as it had been up to the truce. It was of course, important to demonstrate this to the active service units themselves as well as to the British, so as to build up their confidence in themselves and in each other. When operations have been suspended for a time the focal energy of the revolutionary struggle has to be restored. To restore it as soon as possible, and to get the full initiative back to the revolutionary side, I believe it is necessary to attack more or less simultaneously across the whole guerrilla front. This is not to say that more risks should be taken. It simply means synchronising operations to involve as far as possible every area.

In a week of intensive activity the British paid very dearly for destroying the truce. The instructions to Republican units to resume the campaign with an offensive were quickly carried out. A wave of operations took place all over the North. They were of two types, anti-personnel attacks on military targets, and sabotage on government installations, economic and industrial objectives.

In the first eight days the British lost at least fifteen killed and well over a hundred injured, and in the following two weeks they lost another ten dead. Their losses were mostly in the urban areas, including Belfast and Derry. Though their real fatal casualties for the three weeks totalled twenty-five, they admitted only twenty-one. If Whitelaw's aide wasn't worried about their figures, somebody was. They were falsified to keep down anxiety and criticism in England.

None of Whitelaw's explanations pacified the right-wingers. They put heavy pressure on him to order the reoccupation of the Nationalist no-go areas. But politically this was extremely risky, as the British saw it. It would destroy Whitelaw's hopes of winning the Catholics away from their support for the IRA if troops went in to take these areas by force. What was more, General Tuzo was reported to have told the Cabinet that to take Free Derry alone, where there were well above twenty thousand people, could involve the British army in its biggest land battle since the Korean war. In his estimation, the army would have to capture and hold the entire west bank of the River Foyle on which the Catholic areas lay. If they were faking their existing casualties to keep public opinion quiet, they would not be too keen to risk an operation like that without justification. It was better to leave the no-go areas alone until they had a more convincing reason.

In renewing the sabotage offensive, one of the principal aims remained to tie down as many British troops as possible on useless guard duties in the cities and towns, keeping them off the backs of the Nationalist population and from being employed against Republican units in the country areas. Naturally, however, the British would start reducing the numbers of soldiers on such duties unless bombing operations against buildings and installations continued to keep them there. For such operations, the car bomb was particularly well suited.

On Friday, July 21 a concerted sabotage offensive was carried out, with twenty-two bombings in Belfast and thirteen elsewhere. Many of the devices employed were car bombs, and the majority penetrated the British security ring around the centre of Belfast. The objective was to demonstrate that, just as the IRA retained the capability to engage the British army on very serious terms, it was also strong enough to carry out a co-ordinated sabotage blow at thirty-five points throughout the North.

All the targets were industrial, commercial or economic ones. In each case advance warning was given, because the purpose was to show the Republican capacity and impose a sudden and severe financial load on the British-Unionist system, not to cause casualties. Obviously, it would be counter-productive to do so, as far as civilians were concerned. In the Belfast area, as a further precaution against risk to life, *three* warnings were given for each bomb placed. One was telephoned to the Public Protection Agency, one to the Samaritans

organisation, and one to a newspaper. All were given in good time for them to be passed on to the RUC.

In only two of the thirty-five operations were there civilian casualties, but they were severe. The Republican leadership was extremely alarmed. Both incidents were in Belfast. A check established that of the nine fatal casualties reported, two were British military, one was an RUC reservist and a fourth was a member of a militant Protestant organisation. The remaining five dead were civilians, and our attitude was that it was five too many. This loss of life compromised the intended effect of the whole effort. Statements were issued at once making this as clear as possible, but pointing out that responsibility for the loss of life rested fairly and squarely on the British, who had failed to pass on the warnings.

The British behaviour in these cases was mysterious. First, they put out a statement saying that in these two cases no IRA warning was given. But later, when there was undeniable evidence to the contrary, they retracted this. Pro-British media attempted another explanation, that as a result of the IRA operations the public telephone system had been overloaded with reports of incidents that day and the security forces were overwhelmed. This explanation does not stand up. Aside from the fact that the Belfast telephone system is automatic, and no human strain on operators is involved in making a call from point to point in the city area, the two warnings reached the security authorities, so there was evidently no overloading in the in-coming direction. This would mean that the so-called overloading of the phone system took place only *after* the calls were received. In relaying the warnings to target areas, the security authorities did not have to rely on the public telephone service. They had the most sophisticated control centres and radio communications networks. There was no other pressure on their wavelengths in Belfast that afternoon. None of their communications centres was attacked or sabotaged. There were a great many military posts and police stations in the city area, with hundreds of RUC and thousands of troops with armoured cars, landrovers, motor-cycles and squad cars all in contact by radio. It required only one man with a loud-hailer to clear each target area in no time. The claim that the enormous British forces were "overwhelmed" by twenty-two localised explosions would not be likely to impress impartial investigators, much less their own generals or their NATO allies.

The Republicans were convinced that the British had deliberately

disregarded these two warnings for strategic policy reasons. They were endlessly looking for ways to weaken support for the IRA among the civilian population, in line with the counter-insurgency doctrine of giving the guerrilla fish less and less water to swim in. They had every motive to defeat the use of the car bomb by discrediting it as an indiscriminate weapon, which was not why it was devised. On that day, they had the possibility of getting such results by the simplest means imaginable, that is by taking no action at all.

But the events of July 21 were definitely used to serve one other British purpose. According to a London source, Whitelaw told the defence minister Lord Carrington that evening, "Now we can go into the no-go areas."

For many months, the IRA had given a great deal of open and obvious attention to the defences of the no-go areas. During every one of my visits to Free Derry, I went through the motions of inspecting barricades and roads leading into the zone. Similar inspections were carried out in the Belfast no-go areas. Everything possible was done to spread the conviction that a fierce resistance was inevitable if the British tried to reoccupy these areas.

By late July it was evident that the British would not be postponing the reoccupation much longer. Intelligence reported that their codename for the invasion of the no-go areas was *Operation Motorman*. But like a lot of things about their preparations for the big push, this British codename was too clever by half. Any fool could work out that *Motorman* suggested vehicles. And as the British did not use soft-skinned transport in the North, the vehicles could only be armoured. Belfast is not a place where a massive armoured force can be assembled without anybody noticing. Armoured cars, armoured personnel carriers and even heavy tanks were soon reported by our intelligence people to be arriving in large numbers. Some were even brought in from Malta in khaki colour for Mediterranean service and repainted on arrival.

However, if the British had known it, all this huge preparation was totally in vain. The no-go areas were a bluff.

We kept it up for more than a year. It was one of the most successful deceptions ever pulled by a revolutionary movement.

The whole world had heard about the Bogside and the other no-go areas. From a political and publicity point of view they had been of tremendous value. But in plain military terms they were simply not a

practical proposition for us. We had decided long before not to resist a serious reoccupation attempt by the British if it came.

Our units in the Free Derry and Belfast no-go areas did not have the necessary equipment for static defence against a strong armoured force. Apart from that, to attempt the static defence of a built-up area would have been completely contrary to all the principles of guerrilla warfare and of Republican fighting experience throughout this century. The British would use their huge superiority in numbers and equipment to bring our units to battle in a confined area and destroy them.

I cannot say whether Tuzo and Ford actually believed that the Republican leadership would be so naïve as to order a stand-up confrontation. In the case of Derry, they were certainly aware of the hatred they had aroused by Bloody Sunday, and they might well have expected open and bloody resistance. The sheer weight of armour they employed in the event indicates that they did, but that they decided to swamp it. There were also reports that British paratroopers in Germany were rehearsing practice drops in strength on a mock-up of the Free Derry areas.

We naturally kept our views on the military decision by the Republican leadership to ourselves, and defiant statements continued to come out of the no-go areas maintaining that any attempt to invade them would be met with the fiercest resistance. In the last week of July, the signs were unmistakable that the British zero hour for *Motorman* was imminent, and the appropriate instructions were issued to the no-go area commanders. The British armour had been concentrated at several bases throughout the North. When it came, it would not have to travel vast distances.

After a dramatic radio and television announcement by Whitelaw, in which he told the people to keep off their own streets, the Brits moved in the early morning of July 31, using thousands of extra troops and many hundreds of armoured vehicles. The huge heavy tanks in particular were ridiculous with their awkward slewing and manoeuvring as they tried to get through the streets of the little Northern towns in the pouring rain. It looked no different from Czechoslovakia in 1968, although there the Soviet bloc armies had moved in a fraction of the time this clumsy operation was taking. As well as occupying Free Derry and the Belfast no-go areas, the British finally got themselves installed with extra troops and armoured cars in Portadown, Lurgan, Armagh and other towns. The great victory had at last been won, against unresisting civilians.

The troops in the advance vehicles had obviously not quite known what to expect. Some vehicles were milling about. Others got jammed. British officers ran up and down shouting at the drivers. Had their instructions permitted it, IRA volunteers would have had plenty of targets in the first couple of hours, and quite high-ranking ones at that. It must have been a great temptation for men who had not seen a British soldier in these areas for a long time. But nobody gave way to it. The IRA obeyed completely and stood to one side, so to speak. The British were in, and that was that. Concentrated in the strength they were, to provoke them into a shooting match could only cause fearful casualties to the surrounding civilian population.

The rest of the usual colonial contempt for people's rights returned immediately, too. The British killed two young men as they came into Derry. Then they commandeered the schools and community centres and used them as barracks. Friction with the Nationalist civil population was already beginning.

That afternoon I was in a billet with the prominent Belfast Republican, Joe Cahill, who is now in prison. I was drafting a statement regarding *Motorman* and paused to turn on the radio for the headlines on the one-thirty news bulletin on RTE. The news was appalling. A terrible tragedy had struck the small town of Claudy in County Derry. Three car bombs had exploded there. Six people had been killed outright. Over thirty were injured, and some subsequently died. My heart and everything I had inside me just seemed to tighten up into a knot and sink slowly to the bottom of my stomach. "Holy Mother of God," I thought. "Who is responsible for this?"

There could be no military, industrial or economic target of any importance in Claudy, a little place in a valley among the glens where anglers came to fish in the Faughan river. What was more, it was a mixed community of Catholics and Protestants.

We checked immediately with the operations people. Car bombs in rural areas could only be used with permission of the operations staff. They could only confirm what I was fairly certain of already, that no such operation had been planned, intended or submitted for permission. I also knew that any responsible operations officer would have automatically ruled out the use of *three* car bombs in a place that size. We were able to establish contact with the battalion OC and staff of that area, but they adamantly denied any knowledge of the bombings.

I had to leave for Dublin because a television interview had been arranged which would enable me to state Republican policy following *Motorman*. All the way on the journey down, I put my mind to the mystery of Claudy. Who stood to gain from it?

As the Littlejohn affair was to show only too clearly, freelance groups with criminal records worked for the British in Ireland. When an *agent provocateur* uses a freelance unit for a certain job, he does not have to tell them who they are actually serving. As certain cases elsewhere have shown, they may in fact believe they are helping the *opposite* side. Either Claudy was the work of a bunch of head cases working on their own, or it was a callous, deliberate operation in which such a group was exploited by people much cleverer than themselves, in the guise of a pseudo-gang.

At the very moment when the Republican leadership hoped to focus the entire resentment of the country on the massive armoured invasion of the no-go areas, that attention was diverted to Claudy. Again people were horrified, again the IRA was blamed, and again the British received a huge propaganda bonus.

It was essential that we not only deny responsibility for Claudy but condemn the bombing forcefully. When I reached Dublin I read a statement by the Republican leadership to a television camera crew. It tendered our condolences to the relatives of the victims and pointed out that the incident could only serve British military purposes by taking attention off the occupation of the no-go areas. That interview went out on BBC, Ulster TV and other stations. The statement concluded by making it clear that, despite *Motorman*, the struggle would continue.

The denials of the battalion OC and staff were carefully investigated and were subsequently borne out in a court of inquiry. As a military matter, it was cleared up to our satisfaction in that we established that no local Republican unit was involved. In the meantime, the British propaganda services moved quickly to exploit the affair. Two hundred thousand copies were issued of a leaflet entitled *Death of a Village*.

The reoccupation of the no-go areas temporarily appeased the right-wing elements in Britain and the North. Militarily, the British gained nothing from *Motorman*. It was purely political, and like a lot of military operations which are undertaken by conventional armies for political purposes, it created more problems than it solved for the

troops themselves. It tied down in confined spaces a great number of soldiers and armoured transport which could have been on duty elsewhere.

Republican units came into action very quickly in the rural areas, killing a number of UDR and employing landmines in vehicle ambushes and other operations. But it was the beginning of a see-saw strategy. The lull in the towns led many British soldiers into a sense of false confidence that they were at last "getting on top of the IRA." Their intelligence officers must have known better, but the average soldier sees more of the tabloid papers than he does of his brigade IO, and according to these, everything was now very rosy indeed.

After a few more days of rural operations, the IRA suddenly hit back fiercely in the former no-go areas. The guerrillas who had "fled" seemed to be striking from everywhere, shooting British soldiers dead in Belfast. A total of almost one thousand Republican operations was carried out during August, and the enemy suffered severely. A major cause of these casualties was the introduction during that month of the deadly new IRA tactic that was to become famous as the "one-shot sniper."

I had spent a lot of time thinking on and off that it should be possible to bring guerrilla theory closely to bear on the way weapons themselves were used. Sniping was something that needed looking into. In Belfast, for example, during some of the street fighting a sniper might keep firing from the same position for an hour or more, and some of the Protestant extremist ones would get up on a roof and bang away all day without moving.

It seemed to me that prolonged sniping from a static position had no more in common with guerrilla theory than mass confrontations. When a sniper did that he was breaking the guiding principle, giving away his location and presenting himself as a target to a counter-sniper or machine-gun fire from armoured cars. But what gave away his location was his rifle itself every time he used it. One-shot sniping was in fact the theory of the guerrilla rifle. It turned up, struck once and vanished, presenting no target in return.

To make it work, however, would require an extremely high standard of marksmanship and self-control. I discussed the idea with training officers, and a system was devised. First, the best shot would be selected from each marksmanship course. Then he would go on to a special sniper's course. The best and next best performers on each

sniper course would then be trained together as two-man sniper teams. The better of the two shots was the no. 1 or lead sniper, and the other was his “winger” or no. 2 who observed for him. Each team received intensive training. The principle was to fire only one shot, after which, hit or miss — and this was drummed in until they practically screamed — the team went immediately to ground. It was impossible to locate their position provided they fired only one round.

These snipers quickly became much feared by the British, because the tactic was all but unbeatable. Now and again an over-eager sniper with an excellent opportunity to get in a second or even a third shot would disobey his instructions. This betrayed his position, and some were wounded this way, or captured. The majority who adhered to instructions were never in trouble.

The preferred weapon would be a Garand, Mark III or Mark IV .303 Lee-Enfield, or a hunting rifle, with a telescopic sight. Several of these teams were trained for each area, and it was quite expensive to equip them with top-quality sights. In operations after dark the British had the drop on us with their infra-red night sights. They cost fifteen hundred pounds. The IRA experimented with a cheaper type, but it was no good.

One-shot sniping was introduced on a wide scale in Derry, Belfast, Armagh and some rural areas. Crossmaglen developed an exceptionally good unit which exploited the terrain and used the sympathy of the local people to the utmost. Experience gained in engagements there taught the value of ensuring that each position had a good exit ready before the team went into action.

The snipers pushed British casualties up heavily that autumn, and the English papers changed their tune. They were no longer assuring people that the resistance was about to be rolled up. Instead, they were protesting about what they called “the new sneak tactics of the IRA.” This led to another interesting example of a planted psychological warfare rumour: the case of the mythical German master sniper. Although the British generally wore flak jackets, they suffered some casualties in west Belfast. Flak jackets probably saved many other soldiers from being killed by low-velocity weapons, but the IRA’s armour-piercing ammunition went through them easily, and the .303 bullet from the Lee-Enfield would penetrate them at appropriate range. After the casualties in west Belfast, a story was fed to one of the more sensational tabloids that the IRA were

employing a crack mercenary sniper from Germany on contract. This phantom figure had a great run, and I believe he was referred to in Continental and other papers as well. He was supposed to be paid a bonus of five hundred pounds for each British soldier he killed. In between times, he lived under heavy guard in a house in the Falls, wearing dark glasses and eating carrots to protect his night vision. Nobody, of course, ever interviewed him, for the simple reason that he never existed. But that didn't affect the reputation he achieved. It seemed that if the British said the casualties were caused by a sniper from Mars, it would have been printed as fact.

Contrary to such speculation, however, the IRA did not employ mercenaries, although many approaches and propositions were received. A German did in fact offer his services, though he was not a sniper. He said he was an explosives expert. He asked for a hundred pounds a week and a six-month contract, and he said he expected bonuses for good work. It transpired during conversation with him that he knew no more about explosives than our own engineers, and he was politely told to get lost.

There was a small but constant assortment of such characters turning up in Ireland. Some were adventurers, some were dreamers and some were up to no good at all. Unless a mercenary had extraordinary special qualifications (and few of these had) it would be foolish to take him on. It would be bound to lead to difficulties and jealousy. A single man who was a full-time IRA volunteer got his food and a few shillings pocket money. Married men received up to fifteen pounds a week, which was the highest rate paid to anybody in the movement, including myself. Even then I drew it only when I needed it after I gave up my regular job. In contrast, some mercenaries wanted the earth. We were approached by one American who claimed to have been a senior NCO in the United States Rangers. He wanted a hundred and fifty dollars a week for his wife in New York and twenty-five pounds a week expenses for himself. He was asked if he thought money grew on trees, and went away disappointed.

Apart from mercenaries, there were would-be infiltrators. Some discovered that it was not as easy to join as they had been led to believe by those who briefed them, and that trying to work inside the IRA was not an advisable activity. One of these people was called Webb.

Webb first made contact with our organisation in England. He said he had formed a small unit of his own, consisting of himself and three others. He was willing to place it at the disposal of the movement. The report on him said he was extremely intelligent and had put up plenty of good ideas. In the opinion of the person who submitted it, "he is either a gift or a plant." A check-out was done on Webb, but it showed nothing to his discredit. It was decided to bring him into the movement and keep an eye on him without letting him learn too much, until we were more satisfied. He proved to have an undoubted flair for operational planning, and he had the knack of presenting his suggestions in precise, practical terms. I decided I wanted to look him over personally, and he agreed without hesitation to come to Ireland. He proved in conversation to be very critical of his immediate superiors in the movement in England. However, I did not put much importance on this. Webb was clearly somebody who knew his stuff, and many excellent people had come to us by the same route before.

He arrived back in Ireland one Friday night not long afterwards, handing over a bundle of several hundred pounds. The notes were brand new and numbered consecutively. He said that they were the proceeds from a payroll robbery in the north of England. Webb explained that he was using his unit to raise funds by stick-ups.

He was severely rebuked for pulling such a stupid operation and told to stay in line with the movement's policy in England, which certainly did not include this kind of thing. There was nothing clever in endangering the support of our sympathisers there for the sake of a paltry job like that. He seemed extremely disappointed at his reception and said that his unit had only been trying to help. Perhaps if I came over to England secretly and gave them a proper briefing and a pep-talk, it would encourage them to produce the type of results that were really wanted. I told Webb I would consider it.

He cheered up a bit at that, and then produced a very interesting document, an expertly prepared plan for an arms raid. He told me he had done all the intelligence and reconnaissance work himself and proposed that experienced personnel should be sent over from Ireland to do the job with him. My reply was that with proper briefing the person who put that report together would need no assistance from Ireland. The way he was to do it instead was to use the members of his own unit, procure a garage to use as a safe dump and have a hired van. After the raid Webb would drive the van to the

garage on his own. Then, I pointed out to him, nobody except himself would know where the arms were dumped.

He looked at me for a long time. Webb did not keep our next appointment. But by that time a report came back that there had been no such payroll robbery on the date and in the town in the north of England that Webb had mentioned, or in any other town within a forty-mile radius of it. A watch was kept for him, but we never saw Webb again. We concluded that he was working for the British. When he realised we were on to him he did not fool about, but disappeared instantly.

Another would-be infiltrator, known to us as Brown, did not persist as long. He appeared to be taken aback when told that certain background information was required from him for a check-out. After making his approach, Mr Brown decided to move on. His preliminary screening had scared him, and he apparently thought it better to break contact before it went any deeper.

In the next case, a foreigner who made no claim to Irish connections proved to be a much more dangerous proposition. I will refer to him as Paul. He came into contact with the movement as a dedicated revolutionary, and his credentials seemed to be very sound. Nevertheless, a confidential check carried out on him disclosed a discrepancy, and a more intensive investigation uncovered a good deal more. Paul came very close indeed to penetrating the IRA before his activities as an agent were neutralised.

Not all attempted infiltrators were laymen. A clergyman from America reached Dublin and made contact. He claimed to have fabulous ideas about publicity for the movement, plus sources of finance for new equipment. He could only discuss these with the leadership, and on condition that he was accepted as a volunteer. After one meeting with this well connected clergyman, representatives of the leadership concluded he was probably more of a con-man than an infiltrator, for he wasted no time in hinting at a sizeable advance to "cover his expenses." He got some direct and serious advice instead.

Most of the people who came forward and offered their services were, of course, well intentioned. Some were very practical, but others were naive in the extreme. But spies and infiltrators in Ireland took the same kind of risks as they do in most struggles. Some of the British military intelligence officers got away with it and received a minor decoration. Some lost and died one way or another, like the

“Four Square” ring in Belfast. Others were blown and brought to trial in the South, like John Wyman and the Littlejohn brothers, who were more criminals than straight agents. People suspected of trying to infiltrate the movement, however, were not dealt with in the summary manner of the Allied wartime resistance. Firstly, there is always the chance that they are quite genuine in spite of the circumstances. Several of those who came back from England and contacted local units were treated with great caution and reserve, but in fact when careful inquiries eventually produced clearance for them they went on to give first-class service, as did some American citizens of Irish descent. In addition, general orders of the IRA never authorised execution on suspicion. Regulations specify that there must be a thorough investigation, a court of inquiry, and a court-martial, whose findings in turn have to be confirmed by the Army Council. Sectarian assassinations and private revenge killings have often been described as “executions.” This had led to a great many false conclusions. The IRA is an all-volunteer organisation, and people do not volunteer in strength for organisations that give them no personal rights.

In the summer of 1971 the Sinn Féin director of publicity, Seán Ó Brádaigh, said that a young woman had come into contact with that organisation through him. She was a university graduate, then aged about twenty-three, and was supposed to be a linguist. It was felt that she might be able to contribute useful work. Her name was Maria McGuire.

She had to serve as a probationary member of Sinn Féin for a few weeks in a Dublin cumann, and was never a member of any other branch of the Republican movement. To be more specific, in spite of the claims she made later, or which the British made for her, she was emphatically never a member of the IRA, except in her own dramatic imagination. She assisted Sinn Féin publicity in a minor capacity, and also on work for the Comhairle Uladh (Council of Ulster) committees. She frequently travelled to its meetings in Monaghan with Rúairí Ó Brádaigh and Dave O’Connell. As she was fairly articulate, she was also allowed to try her hand at public speaking on such occasions.

When I heard that Maria McGuire had been used in an abortive attempt in Amsterdam to obtain modern equipment, I was furious. Although her role had been peripheral, I would never have dreamed

of employing someone new, completely untrained and from the fringe of the movement on such a confidential operation. For security reasons, however, the people in charge of the operation had clearance to make their own arrangements, and she was taken along as translator without my knowledge.

Following that fiasco, she received an enormous amount of personal publicity. My patience came to an end when she began giving interviews on her own account about Republican policy, in one of which she was foolish enough to let herself be manoeuvred into ridiculing me in public. We had enough problems without this kind of trouble-making. Sinn Féin was asked to expel her. Unwisely, they did not.

I could hardly believe it when I learned that she was being presented as an important defector and "a member of the IRA" who had broken with the movement because she could no longer "remain silent." Her "revelations" were not badly done. One of her *Observer* pieces was headed I ACCUSE SEÁN MACSTIOFÁIN. It came to the point fairly quickly. If I were got rid of, the IRA campaign would stop. I was using and abusing the whole Republican movement in my own interests. I had employed dictatorial methods to gain complete control and remove all opposition ruthlessly. Miss McGuire had seen through all this. Her only aim was to tell it to honest and sincere Republicans who were unaware, and so on.

Fact, fiction and "black" material were plausibly interwoven in the "revelations." Anyone who knew the game could see their purpose immediately. It was simply another attempt to discredit the leadership and encourage disunity in the movement.

But there was a more disturbing side to the whole business. Among the material there was a good deal of fact based on confidential information she had no right to have. There had been a breach of security at the top of the movement, and an inquiry was inevitable. It was long and involved, but inconclusive. Both of the people who had worked closely with her denied passing such information to her, and there was no evidence to prove their responsibility. I, for my part, accepted that neither of them had been involved in a plot to kill me, as the "revelations" had hinted.

The psychological warfare specialists who tried to exploit Maria McGuire had failed to understand something that goes very deep in the psychology of the Irish people. They cannot stand a traitor.

Because of that, the public reaction in Ireland was mostly one of contempt. The movement was affected far less than it might otherwise have been, but the affair left a bitter taste in my mouth.

In a revolutionary organisation, it is safest to have the knowledge you need to have, and not more. Since the truce and the reoccupation of the no-go areas, I had become more careful than ever about my movements. I changed the cars I was using, and made sure not to stay too long in billets or use the same routes too often. But British intelligence, of course, operated on both sides of the border, and if I were captured by the enemy I would have no reason to expect an easy time. Every interrogator in the North would rub his hands at the prospect of getting at me. By now everybody knew what our lads had been put through in Girdwood, Palace Barracks and the other intelligence hell-holes on the way to Long Kesh. Whether a man could hold out against physical torture or not, there were drugs that could take the entire decision out of his hands. I had the utmost confidence in my personal escorts. But there must be other precautions too. The best was not to know too much.

Apart from the security question, there was efficiency. In my opinion, the revolutionary leader who insists on knowing everything that goes on is a fanatic who will soon break himself down with unnecessary detail. What leadership is supposed to do is to get results. He will get better results if there is full confidence between himself and the people in charge of the various staff sections, just as in ordinary management.

Supply, like intelligence, was self-contained. Equipment was purchased, captured or lifted. For example, quite a number of FN rifles were lifted off the docks in Belfast, but 7.62mm NATO-type ammunition for this weapon was not too easy to come by in the earliest days of the campaign. Throughout 1970, however, considerable quantities of this ammunition, 9mm and other stuff were purchased from British army personnel in different parts of the North. Following the death of the first British soldier early the following year, these arrangements ceased.

The secret services of at least three countries — Britain, the United States and the USSR — were actively involved in preventing arms purchases in Europe. The police and intelligence agencies of the NATO powers also gave all possible assistance to the British in their efforts to prevent the IRA obtaining new equipment. Sometimes

they succeeded. But at other times they did not, as the appearance of the new Armalite rifles and the latest type of RPG-7 rocket-launcher in the North proved. The IRA volunteers deserved the best weapons that could be got, and now they had them.

Chapter 18

Undercover War

The dark side of the conflict became increasingly apparent from the late summer of 1972 onwards. The British were now relying on what had been called in other revolutionary situations the “two-war” strategy. In this, the establishment tries to recover control by military repression, but at the same time it tries to destroy the guerrillas’ support among the population by promising reforms. The right-wing Unionist politicians brought the Ulster Defence Association onto the streets to wreck any chance of a negotiated peace and make the British concentrate on a “military solution.” This, of course, was what the Right in England wanted too.

After the Loyalist extremists had made their point, they waited for the British to smash the IRA and recover control of the Nationalist areas. *Motorman* pleased them for a while, but the effects wore off in a very short time. When the IRA hit back, inflicting embarrassing casualties on the British and maintaining a fierce initiative, there was bitter disappointment and disillusion in Loyalist quarters. In east Belfast troops were now jeered for being unable to beat the Republicans.

As a result of this frustration, very ugly elements took an increasing share in the struggle. The attitude of many Loyalist extremists was that if the guerrillas could not be brought to battle and wiped out by the troops, then it was up to Loyalists to liquidate them and their supporters by assassination or undercover means. Already in Belfast a young man had been shot because his assassins thought he was Joe Cahill’s nephew. Joe agreed with me there was a strong possibility that my own family would be attacked too. I decided it was no longer safe to leave them at our house in County

Meath. The British had no reason whatever to prevent anyone from trying to assassinate Republicans, and indeed a British agent said later that my house was one of his targets for this purpose.

The next time I saw Mary, I warned her to be careful. Shortly before the Maria McGuire episode, my wife had received a very nasty surprise package through the post. It was an acid bomb. With me away on the run, she was keeping a wary eye out for such items. No parcels or heavy envelopes were opened. Mary sent for a colleague of mine who took the thing away and exploded it. Soon afterwards a more sophisticated device arrived, but it was also disposed of safely. Since the parcel bomb which had been sent to me in March, there had also been a steady stream of threats by letter, postcard and anonymous telephone calls. They ranged from crudely obscene scrawls, signed with childish names like "The Just Seven," to highly literate warnings of assassination. By no means all these were directed at me. Some were meant personally for Mary. Others were for little Sinéad, who was still only three. And after my grandson Seán Óg was born, even the infant's life was threatened, in one case by poisoning.

With all this going on in my absence, Mary had been under a great deal of strain, though she did not complain. When we were able to meet somewhere and I asked her how things were, she would just say, "All right."

Before the truce the British media and some of the "peace at any price" groups had thought up a headline tactic aimed at Mary. It was reported that a Mrs. Spackman in Andersonstown was offering to exchange homes with her so that my wife could "see how the women and children suffer."

Mary made a much more practical suggestion. "Why don't they ask Mr Heath to go and live in Andersonstown?" she asked publicly. For some reason, the other lady and the media suddenly lost interest, and there was no more about that.

However, as my teenage single daughter was working away from home, Mary agreed to my insistence that she and Sinéad should move. We closed the house, changed the telephone number to a new ex-directory one, and made arrangements for correspondence to be collected and examined carefully before it was turned over to Mary.

In the next six months she and Sinéad changed homes four times. It was only every ten or fourteen days that Mary and I were able to see each other, and far less often that I could see the child. I had seen

my two other daughters grow up through their photographs while I had been in prison in England, and I did not want it to be that way for Sinéad.

I had to make a fairly extended trip in border counties around this time. It was nice autumn weather. Mary and I had spent only two weekends together in half a year. After thinking about it for a while, I decided to bring her along. She and I had long since agreed that for safety's sake the usual rules of security would be observed inside the family as well as outside it. A car would come and pick her up, but she never knew where she was being taken to meet me, and she never asked. This time she arrived with Sinéad, and in spite of all the chopping and changing she was in her usual good mood and spirit.

I suppose that was one of the most peculiar motoring holidays any woman ever spent, but it was the only chance we had to be together, so we took it. It was long-distance travelling, made longer by keeping to the back roads of the border country. At the end of each leg of the journey, I would have a rendezvous with various commanders and staff people. While these meetings were on, Mary would go into another room and she would return when they had dispersed. Then the family would get together again. Sinéad didn't mind these strange comings and goings in the least. She was happy to have me around once more. Those few days cheered me up too, and I was glad we had them. One of the men I had business with had not seen his home for three years, and twelve months later he was still underground.

Although that strange family outing was a great success, I knew I should be careful about any thought of repeating it. Anything with too much of a pattern in it was not wise at the best of times. But with both the British and the Loyalist extremists turning to increasingly clandestine methods of eliminating Republicans, it was now less advisable than ever.

With the growing evidence that *Motorman* had brought very little result for the old-fashioned imperial way of using huge masses of conventional troops and armour, opinion within the British army became divided. Our intelligence people estimated that three-quarters of the British army had already been through the North. They were pulling more troops from the Rhine army and their NATO commitments until there was no town without its garrison. Even before internment, the ratio of security forces to population in the North was about the same as in Belgium under the German

occupation, and several thousand more had been brought in since. But in spite of it all, the policy of military saturation and of trying to intimidate the people by Panzer-type demonstrations of armour was not crippling the IRA. It was also fantastically expensive.

As things turned out, the political results of the *Motorman* policy were not very good either. The Nationalists in the reoccupied areas resented the renewed harassment by the military. When the children's summer holidays ended, the soldiers refused to leave the schools that were being used as barracks. Their behaviour to the civil population was bad in other ways too, and in parts of west Belfast relations between the troops and the local people became really fierce. For their part, the Loyalists soon showed that the political effects of *Motorman* were very short-lived even in their own areas.

If the Unionist politicians thought the UDA was going to jump back into its box until they needed it again, they were wrong. The UDA had decided it liked power as much as the politicians did. Soon it was running an enormous protection racket, collecting huge sums from Protestants and racketeering on a very large scale. The British decided to reassert their own military presence in the Loyalist districts of Belfast, but with their usual stupidity they sent the Parachute Regiment into the Shankill Road. If there was one unit detested by Catholics and Protestants alike, it was the paratroopers. True to form, they gave the people of the Shankill a hard time with insulting and brutal behaviour, and one of them struck a woman in the face with a rifle butt.

The inhabitants decided they were not going to put up with this. They said very forcefully to the UDA, "We're paying you protection money. Go out and protect us." The UDA opened fire, and the paratroopers returned it. Several civilians were killed and a number of others wounded. This showed the unbelievable incompetence which the policies of Whitelaw and the British had reached. Time after time, they had been taken by surprise by practically everything the Loyalists did. Now, barely five weeks after winning them back with *Motorman*, troops were killing Loyalist civilians and armed Protestants were shooting it out with the British army.

It did not stop at that. When the British were responsible for two more Protestant deaths in east Belfast shortly afterwards, the UDA announced that it had formally declared war on the British army. There was a lot of frantic wheeling and dealing in various quarters, and they called it off again after two days. The person who issued

that declaration of war was the vice-chairman of the UDA, Tommy Herron. The British did not forgive him for it. The following autumn he was found dead at Drumbo on the southern outskirts of Belfast after being kidnapped. He had been killed with a single bullet in the head in the neatest and most professional manner, at point-blank range.

Disagreements of many kinds broke out among the Protestant armed extremists over policies, methods and objectives. Some were against the clashes with the British, and others opposed the UDA's involvement in the rackets. The result was that various armed elements started going their own way. Where there had been a few main extremist organisations during the summer, now there were separate splinter groups all over the Loyalist districts. By the end of the following year one newspaper estimated that the number of such groups was thirty-five.

This situation obviously offered great possibilities for one of Kitson's favourite counter-insurgency tactics, the use of pseudo-gangs. In the form employed in Kenya and elsewhere, this consisted of a couple of SAS men leading a local gang posing as guerrillas. Black organisations in the United States gave warnings of pseudo-gangs recruited by government agencies to pose as revolutionaries and carry out illegal acts. It was a tactic that could be adapted to get intelligence, set up people for assassination, or organise provocations.

In 1972 in the North there was no tough, competent auxiliary force that the British could pass the dirty work to. In the past, the idea was that the intelligence sections concentrated on finding out where the enemy was, and the operational units were then told and went out and engaged or arrested him. But Kitson believed that special counter-insurgency units were necessary in which operations and intelligence were combined, and that they should be responsible for gathering as much information as possible themselves. What this amounted to, of course, was that some people in the British army were at last beginning to catch on to the principle that I had been ramming into the lads in our little London unit back in 1949, that in a guerrilla organisation every member must also be an intelligence agent. The British were beginning to see that in fighting revolutions they ought to think like revolutionaries. But I wondered how many of them were really capable of it. They could certainly teach upper-class English cadets at Sandhurst to *study* guerrilla revolution in Ireland. but that was a very long way from thinking like a freedom

fighter whose whole life had been spent in the Bogside or the Falls. This revolution, as anyone could see, was simply a war against injustice. It was senseless for them to put all this thinking into dealing with the war at the top when the obvious solution was to cure the injustice at the root. However, that is the British for you. They invent artificial little states which don't work, and when these blow up they think the answers are to be found in the military academies.

The group set up to put Kitson's theories into practice in the North was the Military Reconnaissance Force, the MRF. Our lads in Belfast insisted that the "R" stood for "reaction," and reactionary it certainly was. Some of its members were former red-caps from the military police. The rest were transferred from many different British army units. Though serving soldiers, they wore plain clothes on and off duty. This was in line with Kitson's argument that special forces could "operate in a more unobtrusive way than regular troops." But events were to prove that the MRF succeeded in drawing more attention to itself than ordinary uniformed soldiers. At first British spokesmen denied that it existed, but this could no longer be sustained after one of its member's admission in court in connection with the Glen Road shootings mentioned earlier. The first units appeared in car squads.

These squads commonly consisted of a civilian car, often hired, with a crew of three. By September 1972 they had been operating in Belfast and Derry for well over a year. But from the beginning of that month onwards we noticed a significant stepping-up and expansion of plain-clothes activity by the British army all over the North. Those who supported the Kitson line seemed to be gaining the upper hand over the conventional "ring of steel" officers.

The car squads were made up of a driver, a man in the front passenger seat and another in the rear seat. The one in charge would be a sergeant or a warrant officer, second class. All would be young and very fit. Their dress would vary. At first they wore sweaters and slacks a lot, but people started to get wise to cars full of young men looking exactly like soldiers in mufti. Later on, there was no telling what they might wear, and some went in for jeans and long-haired wigs. Each of them carried an automatic pistol, and a sub-machine-gun was concealed in the car, usually under the front seat. One of the reasons for hiding it was that if ordinary military patrols saw a

weapon in a car they would open fire first and ask questions afterwards.

This sub machine-gun, in many cases, was a Thompson, an obsolete weapon as far as the British army was concerned. But MRF squads were taken to Kinnegar firing range and taught to handle and fire it. The British had much more modern sub machine-guns in their own army, Sterlings firing a 9mm round. Why would they use older, low-velocity Thompsons? The reason was simple enough. Some of these squads carried captured Republican weapons so that when they used them people would think they were Republicans. They also carried a "shoot at sight" list of certain IRA officers. If any of these were encountered and assassinated, the killers would be posing as Republicans, and bullets and ejected cartridge cases from the low-velocity Thompsons would point to the IRA, too. In the old days, when the Auxiliaries managed to assassinate someone on their wanted list, that was that. In counter-insurgency, it was followed through and exploited to the full in the British effort to weaken the freedom fighters' bases among the people. The counter-insurgency psychological sections would build up a rumour campaign in Nationalist areas and prime the media with stories of an internal feud in the IRA or a vendetta with the "officials." After a while, a story about some scandal or alleged embezzlement would be carefully leaked to one or two British reporters, providing an explanation for the "feud." This would be dutifully picked up by the Dublin papers in turn.

The official reason for the car squads was surveillance duties. In fact, again in line with Kitson's scheme, their job was also to bring in intelligence. They had several different methods on patrol, and considering all the thought that had gone into the whole plan, some of these methods were pretty stupid. On a number of occasions, particularly in Fermanagh and Tyrone, we received reports that strange motorists were being unusually generous in offering lifts to hitch-hikers. After stopping and picking them up, the men in the car would open conversation. The hitch-hikers were always asked if they knew anything about the IRA. Anybody who was in it? Anything about Republican activities? At this, they would usually freeze. In those parts, questions about the IRA would not produce very talkative answers, whether the people getting the lift were sympathetic to the movement or not. When they were, they would report

details of the car and the occupants afterwards, enabling our units to build up a picture of the patrols and their routines, with a view to engaging them. But the British changed cars and number plates all the time, and there was more chance of recognising the MRF personnel themselves than the vehicles.

In strongly Unionist rural areas these MRF patrols would travel in cars or vans owned by members of the UDR. These vehicles, being well known locally, were less likely to be stopped or to draw attention. In Nationalist areas they used cars with Southern registrations, but it didn't work. In those districts a strange car was a suspicious car, wherever it came from, and the tactic came to our notice very quickly.

The British began to pull out every trick in the book that autumn in the effort to break the revolutionary movement. Their most urgent need was low-level intelligence. Important political information was supposed to be obtained by the Secret Intelligence Service. What the brigade intelligence officers and the MRF units were after was "contact" intelligence, that is a name, an address, a photograph or word of a planned operation that would lead them to men, equipment or explosives.

They resorted to the practice of picking up minor criminals and suspects in the Nationalist areas. These were subjected to combined pressures, including bribery, blackmail and threats to charge them with offences carrying long sentences. Between ten and twenty such people lived in Palace Barracks in Holywood at various times, having agreed to work for their captors. A couple were trained for infiltration and provocation, but the majority were only up to the lowest kind of spotting and denouncing. The polite description for these was "observers."

Wearing hoods, they were taken out from the barracks in Saracen tanks on trips around the streets of their home areas. If they spotted someone they knew or suspected to be a Republican, they would put the finger on him or her. The radio operator in the Saracen would immediately call up a waiting patrol, who would rush to the spot and make the arrest. A number of people were denounced in this way, but many of them were able to prove they had nothing whatever to do with any Republican organisation. The British wasted a good deal of intelligence time and effort sorting out these fantastic denunciations. In spite of their unenviable position, some of the "observers"

were evidently trying to play safe. Using this kind of petty informant naturally brought only very limited results.

These difficulties forced the MRF to set up a special undercover system to get contact intelligence themselves. It was quite an extensive network. Its members did not live in barracks but operated from shops, offices and flats throughout Belfast, using both men and women. The network ran a number of phoney businesses, including a massage parlour. Wherever it could, it used soldiers with Northern backgrounds or agents that would not seem out of place. It set some of them up as street vendors who could station themselves in certain areas or move around estates without arousing suspicion. However, the MRF network also had one particular business that operated on a bigger scale.

This was known as the Four Square Laundry. It was an application of the principle that any roundsman's business is excellent cover for this kind of work, but it was very sophisticated besides. Laundry vans are usually big ones, so there was a good excuse to have a vehicle capable of holding several men and their equipment.

Four Square did business as a real laundry. The van toured Nationalist areas in Belfast soliciting custom and making collections and deliveries. The washing was put out to another laundry on contract, and customers seemed to find the prices reasonable.

The intelligence was gathered in two ways, by direct observation and conversation in the target areas and by scientific examination of the washing itself. The driver had good opportunities to study each house, chat with the women, pick up bits of information and note any men who appeared. Meanwhile the others hidden inside the van were able to observe everyone in the street and take photographs as the vehicle stood outside a house or moved on slowly to the next. When it returned from its round, the laundry lists for each household were checked against the bundles before they went off to be washed at the real laundry.

If men's shirts of two different sizes came from a household where there was only supposed to be a young family, intelligence officers could conclude that somebody besides the man of the house was staying there. If that house was on their watch list, they now had a contact lead. The scientific tests would show traces of lead, powder or explosives on clothing, or a spot of gun oil on bed linen, an indicator that a weapon had been under a pillow at a certain address.

The MRF then had a choice of moves. They could search that house, bring in a suspect, or put him under surveillance in the hope that he would lead them to bigger possibilities.

I was not to regret the work I had put in improving the IRA intelligence officers' efforts in the North in the early days. I now learned from their successors in the intelligence staff of the Belfast brigade that they were onto something big. They said no more, but I hoped they would pull it off. They did. A counter-operation was planned, and the IRA waited until the most favourable opportunity presented itself. Then it struck, and struck hard. The laundry van had been collecting washing and information on the new housing estate at Twinbrook when it was suddenly attacked and put out of business.

The British were badly shaken. A special officer who had not been seen before took over all inquiries about the incident. They admitted that the driver of the van had been killed. But unexpectedly they also issued many details about what the Four Square had been up to. It was clever enough. The operation had been well and truly blown, and they knew there was nothing to be gained by bluffing it out. Instead, they tried to turn it to good account by claiming that the laundry had been tremendously successful in getting intelligence. They calculated that British public opinion would not be too concerned if they admitted the death of the driver, as he was not English. He was a Northerner described as a sapper of the engineers.

The interesting information which the British gave out was also a smoke-screen to hide the real extent of their losses in this operation. The IRA in fact had liquidated not one but *five* MRF agents in Belfast that day. Three met their deaths in the van itself, the driver and two hidden in an observation compartment under the roof. The activities of the other two were ended in a flat on the Antrim Road.

The Four Square fiasco was the worst intelligence defeat the British had suffered since the campaign began. Kitson seemed weak on defensive theory. He talked all the time about eliminating guerrillas. He had very little to say about the possibility that the guerrillas would eliminate the "special forces."

We had received intelligence reports as early as May 1971 that the notorious British SAS was operating undercover in Belfast. During the summer and autumn of 1972 plain-clothes squads were clearly established as being involved in shootings or killings in Ballymurphy, Andersonstown, Lesson Street, New Lodge and the Falls Road. The

cars were often given away by the speed with which they were passed through British checkpoints.

In Andersonstown five men were machine-gunned from a car in May, and one of them was killed. People were certain that the assassins were Protestant extremists. But a tip-off from a Protestant RUC officer who resented this and knew the truth made them change their minds. At the inquest *seven months later*, after issuing three false statements the British army admitted that one of its plain-clothes squads had been responsible.

At the end of August vigilantes were on duty in Greencastle, a Catholic area in north Belfast where several shooting attacks had recently been made on people from cars. During the night they stopped a car with three men in it and took one of them out. The others drove off, firing a shot as they went. The detained man had an army-issue automatic pistol in a shoulder holster. Asked to identify himself, he said he was "Peter Holmes" and was a member of the SAS stationed at Palace Barracks. He was disarmed and sat down at the side of the road until a British military patrol arrived and the vigilantes handed him over.

During September one of these "black" operations went wrong. There was a night exchange of fire lasting more than an hour in the New Lodge area. It turned out to have been between one of the car squads and a British commando patrol. A marine commando was killed and another seriously wounded, and a man in plain clothes was shot dead. People in neighbouring houses had heard him shouting in a Belfast accent before he was hit. His body was taken away in a Saracen, and the British claimed later that he was a civilian. But no civilians were reported missing that night.

As I have said already, an exhaustive Republican inquiry was held into the blowing up of McGurk's bar, and we were convinced that this too had been a British "black operation." Later on a British military spokesman admitted that "unidentified gunmen" had provoked certain confrontations. He said that some bombings and assassinations must have been caused by "mavericks" and "situationists" exploiting the unrest. There were no attempts to explain the coincidence between these events and similar ones which occurred in Aden, where the SAS had been used in a counter-insurgency role. Nor was it explained how the "situationists" were able to drive through British checkpoints at high speed.

During the autumn there was also a fresh series of attempts to

infiltrate into the movement several persons claiming to have “special service” qualifications or to be freelance explosives experts. These attempts were made both in the North and the South. The persons in question were spotted for what they were and neutralised. Similar efforts were made in the case of the so-called “official” IRA. Kenneth Littlejohn, the former British paratrooper with a known criminal record, had made contact with them with the approval of British intelligence at a high level in London.

The British “black” campaign was being carried across the border. Littlejohn was already preparing the bombing provocations in the South to which he has since confessed. British agents kidnapped a Republican, Seán Collins, from Dundalk and forcibly took him over the border into the North, where he was put into Long Kesh. Littlejohn and his brothers identified a “Captain Van Dorn” as the British intelligence officer who supervised the Dundalk incident. Later Captain G. C. Van Orden of the Intelligence Corps was given a minor decoration, the MBE, for unspecified services in the North. (The abbreviation MBE, of course, means “Member of the British Empire.” The British “empire” was now confined to the tiny Channel Islands, the Celtic countries of Wales and Scotland and Man and the six counties of the North. We were determined to make it smaller still.)

Kitson’s counter-insurgency formula, as he put it himself, also included “methods of carrying out large scale persuasion” which would become increasingly important in comparison with armed operations. His outline of his ideal “special force” provided for psychological operations specialists. Now, the business of psych-ops specialists is to get at people’s fears and emotions, and you cannot do that on a large scale without some access to the media.

Some of the British media had better intelligence connections than others. The right-wing *Telegraph* group in London has always been anti-Irish, going back over decades. One of its former editorial executives had been in the Secret Intelligence Service. Another, not long dead, had been a very big wheel in naval intelligence and was a leading authority on intelligence in general. The group had close connections with Conservative politicians. The Tories had various powerful fingers in television in England, and so had the Unionists in the North. Geoffrey Johnson-Smith, the junior minister for army affairs in Heath’s government, was a media specialist. He had been a professional television man and had many friends and contacts in the

broadcasting business. Johnson-Smith had also been vice-chairman of the Conservative Party. And it was he who arranged for the British provocation agents, the Littlejohn brothers, to meet officials of British intelligence. The British had a huge range of resources for Kitson's psych-ops specialists to tap.

The first inkling of the latest move against me was when Dublin was plastered with posters advertising a forthcoming article in the *Sunday Telegraph*. The posters referred to "the Englishness of Seán MacStiofáin." When the article itself came out, it proved to be merely a personal attack on me. Its essential theme was that my Irish connections were thin. It did not spare my dead parents either, though neither of them had caused England any harm in their lives. I was too occupied with other things that weekend to be as disgusted as I might otherwise have been. However, I decided that it was about time we woke up and stopped making it easier for the British media in this kind of war.

On my initiative, the Republican movement issued a statement early in October concerning the British propaganda offensive which was being waged against us and which exceeded any efforts by them in this field since the Second World War. It stressed that this offensive was obviously an indication of how seriously the British regarded the military situation in the North. All further interviews with Republican representatives by British journalists, whether by television, radio or newspapers, were ruled out. Representatives of the media from other countries, who of course had no interest in playing the British game, continued to be welcome.

The result was that the British media were soon being forced to concoct "quotes" from us out of thin air. But English, Northern and Southern papers still concentrated a fire of personal condemnation at me. Anyone would think there would have been no revolution, no violence and no bloodshed in Ireland were it not for myself. But there was obviously a focal theory of counter-insurgency being attempted, and it was based on the mistaken idea that if I were removed the struggle would collapse. Events were to prove otherwise.

Appropriately enough, it was at Munich that Lynch and Heath met that autumn, paving the way for the Fianna Fáil government in Dublin to sell out the Irish resistance movement to the British. It was during the 1972 Olympic games. This time Heath was not quite so arrogant towards Lynch's claim that Dublin must be consulted in any talks held about the future of the North. The British had been unable

to contain the IRA, and Heath had at last realised that Lynch might make a useful ally. When Lynch now put forward his government's case again, Heath hinted at a bargain. "Why don't you pull in MacStiofáin and the rest?" he said.

In fact, there was nothing that Lynch and his ministers for justice, O'Malley, would have liked more. Fianna Fáil might still call itself a "Republican party" but it was really scared stiff that the revolutionary situation in the North would spill over and threaten its own political power in the South. What they would really have appreciated was a nice short six-day revolt which they could exploit afterwards in patriotic speeches. Lynch tried to condition the public in the South for a mass internment of Republicans. He told them the government had learned of a plot to kidnap certain Dublin politicians. But plots "discovered" by Dublin in recent years proved all too often to be first heard of in material which the British secret intelligence fed to various Southern politicians for its own strategic purposes. When Lynch saw that the public were extremely cynical about the kidnap yarn, he hastily dropped it.

By late 1972 both Heath and Lynch were aware that it was too late for attempts to destroy the Republican movement at the base by trying to round up its broad membership. The alternative was to try to destroy it from the top. Coincidentally, a series of extraordinary incidents began occurring in the South.

On September 22 unknown men petrol-bombed two Gardai stations in Castlebellingham and the village of Louth, not far from the border. There was a wave of bank robberies. A large bomb found in Dundalk town hall was defused with enormous publicity by a technical officer whose picture appeared in the Southern newspapers. The bomb was made of a nitrobenzene mix to throw the blame on the IRA. This incident stuck out a mile as a plant.

Nevertheless, all was immediately attributed to the IRA. O'Malley on the radio made a threat of "extremely unpleasant" measures if anyone were caught in connection with such activities, and the right-wing hawks in the South clamoured for the arrest of myself and other Republican leaders. Intense police and Special Branch activity quickly became widespread, and the Gardai mounted repeated raids and searches for us all over the counties of Dublin, Meath, Louth, Kildare, Leitrim, Cavan and Monaghan.

I was actually in one house when the police arrived. I got out by the skin of my teeth through a side window and across the fields,

getting my trousers covered with cowdung in the process. Luckily I was able to make myself presentable before the next meeting I was due to attend, but there was still a strong aroma of cow. All I could do was to borrow an aerosol from the woman of the house, but as it was hair spray, it created another problem. I had to appear in trousers which were stiff as boards from the knees down.

A night or two later I was spotted while I was in a car. A squad car chased us, but we knew the countryside better than they did, and we drove into the back ways and lost them. Even so, it was a narrow escape for me, because a few minutes after dropping me the driver was stopped by police. "Where is your passenger?" they asked him. It was only me they were interested in that time, and as the driver and the car were clean they let him go.

The next in the strange series of unexplained incidents occurred in early October, and though very few people could have known it then, it was to be an extremely critical one. A group of armed men raided a branch of Allied Irish Banks in Grafton Street in the centre of Dublin. They got away with sixty-seven thousand pounds, but they took a very long time about it. They addressed each other by such titles as "commandant" and "major" and "corporal" in the full hearing of the bank staff. The only purpose could be to leave the impression that they were a military organisation. By that afternoon, certain Southern politicians and big businessmen were stirring up the feeling that "something will have to be done about the IRA." But once again somebody had made a mistake. There are no such ranks as "major" or "corporal" in the Irish Republican Army, and the Southern security authorities surely knew this.

Nevertheless, the police hunt for Republicans was further intensified and Gardai roadblocks were now common. During this period I had to get through several wearing different forms of disguise. The search for information was bearing a strong resemblance to British tactics in the North. Police and detectives would call at houses on any pretence down to inquiring about dog licences, and in the course of the conversation the householder would be asked whether he or she knew if I might be staying in the area. Word came back to me from so many different places about these inquiries that I knew the pressure for my arrest was growing considerably, and that the source of this pressure was O'Malley, the Minister for Justice. He was a pompous young Fianna Fáil politician from Limerick. Lynch and himself reminded me of the old police routine of the decent cop and

the hard cop. Lynch would come on television looking gentle and tired. O'Malley would make the hard-line speeches about law and order.

But pressure or not, work still had to be done. Day after day there was business to discuss, suggestions to be examined, instructions to be given and all the rest of it. For security, I changed billets continuously. I never met people in the house where I was staying. They would be told to call to a separate house four or five miles away. Only one person at the call house would know where my billet was at the moment, so that I could be reached if something urgent came up.

People prepared to put up a revolutionary leader have every motive to be discreet themselves, and in Ireland they invariably are. But many generous and courageous offers of hospitality have to be turned down while one is underground. For example, it is essential not to use a house or flat as a billet if there are children of school age in the family. Since they are extremely observant, they may recognise the visitor and mention it at school or with playmates. For similar reasons, a safe billet is one that does not have too many callers. Preferably, there should not be a house opposite. On all these grounds, a housing estate is best avoided for this purpose. Ease of access and alternative ways of leaving are most important.

An appointment with a journalist from an internationally renowned German magazine provided me with confirmation that collusion between British and Southern intelligence was by now closer than ever. The German had been working in the North and the previous night had visited a Republican house in Derry. British intelligence must have watched him, and when he crossed the border in his car Southern detectives took over surveillance to see if he would lead them to anyone important. However, a uniformed Garda patrol took the bull by the horns and upset everything by waving him over to the edge of the road and stopping him. He was searched, his notebook and tape recorder were examined, and he was asked who he was going to interview. He had more sense than to give this away and managed to bluff it out. I had to cancel another interview arranged with an overseas journalist because of similar police pressures.

I had a near miss in a village where I was to be picked up at two o'clock by a driver who was reliable and invariably arrived on the dot. When he was late I realised that something had gone wrong. It

was about five o'clock when I received a message explaining what had happened. Once again an impatient Garda had stopped the car instead of hanging back, playing the waiting game and letting it lead them to me. They searched the car and found documents concealed in it which were considered to be incriminating. My driver was arrested and eventually sentenced to nine months.

Those documents had apparently been there for some time, and it was only after the most thorough search that they were discovered. When travelling in a car, I would always ask the driver first if he was sure that both he and the car were clean. If either was not, I would make him stop immediately and go back to the billet, where anything that could possibly be considered incriminating would be left behind. After that particular escape, I started inspecting cars very carefully myself to make sure that everything was all right. If I had been caught like that with the goods in the car there would be no point in making any kind of protest, and things would probably have turned out very differently for me than going on a long hunger-and-thirst strike. When I was finally arrested it was as much my own fault as anyone's else's.

Mary and Sinéad had moved further south now. Mary knew the heat was really on and was worried. She had been shaken when she learned I had been almost killed by the car overturning in January, and she could imagine from our few days together what those back roads along the border would be like in a car chase late at night. We would have given a lot to meet just now, but it was safer not to.

At the end of October, as I was a member of the outgoing Ard Comhairle, it was considered important that I should somehow manage to attend the big Sinn Féin occasion which was only a few days away. This was the Ard Fheis, or annual convention. The previous year it had been my privilege to deliver in person the traditional message to the hundreds of delegates from the leadership of the Republican movement, and the idea was that if possible I should now attend and do so again.

There were two sides to the question, however. On the one hand, if I appeared together with other leading Republicans, especially those from the North, this would shoot down hostile propaganda and demonstrate that the leadership was intact and united. On the other hand, the Ard Fheis was being held in Liberty Hall, right in the centre of Dublin and about the tallest and most conspicuous building in the city. The whole area would be alive with uniformed police,

Special Branch and intelligence agents from all quarters. How the hell could I get in without being arrested?

In the end I decided I would try it, but without doing anything foolhardy. I waited in a safe house not far from Liberty Hall. On the Saturday morning there was too much Special Branch and police activity around the building for me to attempt to go in. By the afternoon, however, things had cleared out appreciably. The eight hundred delegates had settled down inside to work their way through the weekend's agenda of more than a hundred resolutions, and Sinn Féin stewards had their own tight security controls at the main and inner doors. Around five o'clock in the evening, most of the Special Branch men seemed to have left them to it and gone home. I came out of the safe house and stood by the river lower down near the Customs House, watching while the area opposite was thoroughly checked out for me.

By now there was just one Special Branch car parked by the Liffey wall across the quay from Liberty Hall. I waited until a bus came over Butt Bridge, turned left on to the quay and stopped, conveniently blocking their view of the main entrance. I simply walked across the road, slipped behind two young Gardai and walked straight into the building. I knew I would have no trouble leaving. All I had to do was to stay inside until the session ended that night and come out among the crowds of delegates.

It was the biggest Ard Fheis held for almost fifty years. I was immensely heartened by the lively, confident atmosphere in the big auditorium. When I appeared with several leading Republicans from the North, we got a great reception and a standing ovation. After all the abuse as a personal propaganda target, it wasn't a bad feeling to be cheered for a change. If any of Kitson's psych-ops experts could have seen our solidarity that evening they would have realised what a task they had ahead of them yet.

As I expected, when the session was over I was able to walk out in the middle of the crowd. A number of young men walked across with me to a waiting car to make sure there would be no attempt to arrest me, then I slipped away in the car. I was pleased that everything had gone so well. In spite of the odds, the traditional message from the leadership had been delivered in person. Some of the resolutions on the agenda at that Ard Fheis were from a Sinn Féin cumann in North London, where I had first become a Republican myself. The movement went on.

Next morning the press screamed to high heaven. "Is Séan MacStiofáin really wanted?" one Sunday paper demanded. I was reported to have swaggered into Liberty Hall with a strong bodyguard of henchmen, demonstrating my contempt for the Dublin government. Some of the British and Unionist media indignantly pressed for my arrest.

That weekend Dublin had a series of bomb scares, and again these incidents had some strange features about them. Small incendiary devices damaged rooms in four city hotels. A twelve-pound explosive bomb was found in Connolly station, where the trains arrive from the North. Another was discovered a long time afterwards in the bus station across the road from Liberty Hall. It was in luggage left that weekend. After lunch on the Sunday, police under a superintendent tried to prevent the Ard Fheis from resuming, saying that a time-bomb had been planted in the building. When nothing was found, Sinn Féin insisted on continuing its business, and the police left. All this gave Dublin a fright, and once again the Southern public was left with the impression that none of this would have happened were it not for the activities of the Republican movement.

It was only the little incendiary devices which had gone off, whereas the much larger explosive bombs did not. In all four cases, they produced only insignificant fires which mysteriously did not spread. For their part, the larger explosive bombs caused no damage at all because they did not detonate. The effect of the bomb in the station was a psychological one caused by its discovery. The Dundalk town hall bomb which was so heavily publicised had not exploded either. Leaving the bomb in Connolly station was intended to implicate someone arriving in Dublin from the North. It was only too clear that maximum public nervousness was deliberately being caused *within* the South with minimum risk to property. The objective could only be to destroy sympathy towards the struggle in the North, and the men and women fighting it.

The following day the British government's awaited Green Paper appeared. It was made up of the vague kind of hopes that Whitelaw had tried to sell us at the London meeting. Many quarters in Dublin grabbed at a phrase in it which referred to "the Irish dimension" in the Northern problem. This was a piece of British cheek, if you like. Heath's government was trying to say, without actually saying it, that it couldn't keep up the farce of pretending that the North was an internal concern of the United Kingdom alone. In the entire

document of nearly forty pages there was not one single word of a practical proposal.

The catch followed two days later when the British published a bill for the holding of a border plebiscite in the North. The result, of course, would be a foregone conclusion. Heath and Whitelaw would use the automatic Unionist majority in a border poll as propaganda to justify the British presence to international opinion. Inside Ireland, it would serve no purpose whatsoever except to deepen sectarian antagonism. The only sensible move for the Nationalist population was to refuse to be exploited in this way. A complete Nationalist boycott of the poll would turn the weapon back on the British themselves, leaving them to explain to world opinion why so many people had refused to vote.

This was what I advocated, and I wrote an editorial for *An Phoblacht* rejecting the Green Paper. In the same way, I advocated the boycott of the equally meaningless Darlington conference, as I would all other attempts to thwart the right of majority in the *whole* of Ireland to determine the future of the country. In the event, when the border poll was held the following year, forty-two per cent of the electors boycotted it and abstained from voting. The British could hardly do much with that kind of propaganda.

In the war zone, our Northern units changed their own tactics as they encountered new enemy ones. We decided to cut back on bombing operations and severely restrict use of the car bomb. There were too many unexplained bombings and provocations going on, North and South, and the less scope there was for the Republican guerrillas to be confused with these "black" operations, the better. Loyalist extremists of the UDA had also taken a hand, raiding across the border and bombing Donegal. In view of this situation, Republican sabotage operations were curtailed for the time being and a very selective policy was pursued.

In guerrilla conditions it is preferable not to keep explosives stored for long periods, so supplies saved as a result of this policy were used instead for increased landmine and booby-trap operations against suitable military targets. Many large mines were built and laid to await British armoured vehicles. In rural areas, landmines offer no target and are most economical in manpower, giving the possibility of serious enemy casualties in return for low-profile activity by a very small landmine party, positioned well away from the target.

Large mines built in this period in fact destroyed quite a number of enemy vehicles and inflicted substantial casualties. But the spectacular success they wanted did not come the way of the rural units, although the Crossmaglen unit became particularly expert in this form of warfare. It was the smaller mines that caused most of the British casualties.

The effective use of both roadmine and booby-trap called for a good deal of shrewd psychology on the part of the local commanders. Roadmine targets travelled on fixed routes and it was no good laying a mine somewhere they would pass at speed. On the other hand, a spot where they would have to slow down would be as obvious to them as to the attackers, and they would search such a spot very carefully for mines. But there were ways to outsmart them. Booby-trap targets, on the other hand, would not come within range of the devices automatically in the majority of cases, but had to be attracted to them. This required still more ingenuity.

In one technique, an empty house would be booby-trapped, then somebody posing as an informer would telephone the military authorities. The call would be made on the confidential phone system which the British had set up to enable civilians to pass tip-offs to them direct. The caller would report that arms or equipment were believed to be hidden in the house, and the military would say, "Okay, we'll look into it." Later, volunteers who made these trap calls found it was better not to give too many details, just to say that men had been seen "acting suspiciously" at the house in question. The British never seemed to be able to resist the idea of someone acting suspiciously, and they would be around to the address in no time. Again and again they walked into it with these booby-traps in unoccupied houses, and they had heavy casualties from them.

In another method, damaged or useless weapons would be concealed under the floorboards. When the soldiers had checked out the exterior and interior of the house and considered it safe, the rest would enter and start to take it apart. Eventually they would prise up the floorboards, see the weapons and think they had hit the jackpot. When they lifted the arms, the booby-trap was activated. Naturally, their own unit intelligence officers noticed there was a pattern between booby-trap casualties and tip-offs on the confidential telephone system. This was one of several ways in which the informer-phones were played back against them, with the result that many of the military came to mistrust what they had thought was a foolproof way of getting contact intelligence.

I referred earlier to the success of Republican intelligence in obtaining copies of British army confidential circulars. As well as those dealing with anti-devices patrols and other operational instructions, we received quite a number in the form of situation reports or casualty reports. These circulars would list incidents for the previous few days and give the actual casualties in these incidents, as distinct from those admitted by the British army press officers. When our intelligence checked the published reports against these confidential circulars, there were frequently discrepancies. Where the press account of an incident implied zero casualties, it was nothing rare for the circulars to say, "One member of the security forces was wounded, one seriously wounded, and one member killed." There is no doubt that after the end of *Motorman* the British military authorities concealed real losses in the North even more often than before it.

At that time the leadership of the movement made a point of seeing that regular operational statements were issued to the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau for release every ten days or fortnight. These gave details of known enemy casualties inflicted in operations during the period covered, listed those not admitted by the enemy, and reported the more important sabotage operations. In the four months from the end of the truce to mid-November the enemy admitted sixty British soldiers were killed, but the true figure, as revealed through Publicity Bureau operational statements, was sixty-eight.

Had it not been for the continual casualties they were taking, the British would obviously have preferred to sit tight in the cities and towns, hoping to wear down the urban IRA units by a policy of attrition. Instead, however, they were drawn out by the aggressive activity of our units in rural areas. The seriousness with which the British took these country units can be seen from the new tactics the enemy now introduced.

They turned to combined air-land operations using bigger troop formations and making fuller use of their equipment, although in the main this heavy battle stuff could not be employed with much efficiency against light and mobile guerrilla forces. They started to employ an increasing number of very large foot patrols. These would lie up all day in the rural areas where Republican units had been most successful, moving out in strength at night. In border areas the

enemy stopped motorising patrols altogether and adopted the extensive use of helicopters. These included the "bubble" type used for observation, gunships and large Wessex troop-carriers. Patrols would be brought in and landed by the helicopters. Having searched a sector, they would be picked up and taken away again, to repeat this operation elsewhere. It was given out by the British that the helicopters were fitted with Macrolon or some newer type of plastic armour that made them invulnerable to ground fire, but this was just another bit of psy-war stuff, probably invented in the MRF rumour factory. Far from being invulnerable to ground fire, between the beginning of September and November 1972, several British helicopters were hit and damaged, and two were forced down. These were observed by local people to be taken away by road transport.

In another form of air-land combined operations, helicopters and heavily armoured vehicles would work together in a joint search pattern, keeping in touch by radio. They would scour a sector of the countryside together, looking particularly for parties of volunteers on landmine duty. The helicopter would watch the ground below in the hope of spotting men or movements that might indicate a mine party's position, and it also looked for signs of disturbed soil or road surfaces that betray the location of the mine itself. I had noticed in my own trip in a helicopter the day we went to London how clearly ground markings can show up from the air. Meanwhile the armoured vehicle on the road below would systematically search every culvert, every bridge, drain or other place that could conceal or take a mine. But it does not pay to relax when fighting a guerrilla opponent. Despite these fine-comb tactics, they continued to suffer casualties from mines. The volunteers of the landmine party would sit still to avoid alerting the helicopter spotter, but still keep the search party from the armoured vehicle under close observation. As soon as the vehicle and the helicopter moved on to the next sector, the lads would slip down and stick a mine in a culvert that had just been searched. And time and again the British would run slap into it on their way back. Making sure that there is no unsearched area of a road at any given moment is quite a problem, and the occupation forces certainly did not solve it.

When these combined searches began, the Sioux helicopters probably thought they had the easy end of the job, for the armoured vehicles below risked coming on top of the mine itself. But when the Sioux were fired at they could not rise very quickly, and they soon

took to sitting up so high they could spot very little. On a cloudy day they were no good at all, and snipers could operate against the ground search parties to excellent effect. Not much thought was given to the likelihood that our guerrillas themselves might have a use for helicopters. When the IRA employed one to rescue Séamus Twomey and his comrades the following year in their world-famous escape from prison, the effect was devastating, and the British army described the operation as “a serious reverse.”

From the autumn of 1972 all landmines were fitted with anti-handling devices, and although some mines were discovered in the air-land searches, several enemy bomb disposal technicians were killed or injured trying to dismantle them. After coming across a number of these sensitised landmines in position, the British learned not to try to shift them but to blow them up *in situ*.

The people of Dublin had yet to realise, as we had done for more than three years, the cold-blooded calculation of the political game that was being played. When the criminal ex-paratrooper Kenneth Littlejohn was arrested with his brother Keith and another Englishman, he betrayed his connections with British intelligence, which he admitted working for in the South as an *agent provocateur*. It was the Littlejohn gang who had committed the “military-style” bank robbery in Grafton Street, who had carried out the bombings of the police stations in Castlebellingham and Louth, who had followed the order of the intelligence captain “Van Dorn” in Dundalk. Kenneth Littlejohn confessed that he had organised these and other provocations in the South and that he had been introduced to British intelligence officials in London by a member of Heath’s government, the junior army minister Johnson-Smith.

Littlejohn later said he and his gang had planned my own assassination and had sat in a car in the vicinity of my home in Meath waiting for the right opportunity. They had done this for several days. But I knew that any group of men waiting in a car would have come under counter-surveillance, and in any case I was on the run at that time. The only discreet way to watch my place would be from a private house. The car story could be a cover-up. The rest of the details Littlejohn gave, however, certainly matched the British counter-insurgency pattern of assassination not merely to eliminate Republicans but to provoke internal feuds in the movement. After I was killed and disposed of, my own car was to be driven to Dublin

and left in the car park there, with various indications that I had gone to Canada. Then the allegation was to be spread that I had fled in connection with the embezzlement of Republican funds.

However, it was several months before the Littlejohns' real activities became known in Ireland. By then another British agent, John Wyman, had been arrested in the South. Such provocations had contributed greatly to creating a climate of public fear in the South, and at least thirty other British agents were operating there.

These fears were unscrupulously exploited by the Lynch government to bring in the vicious emergency legislation prepared by O'Malley, the amendments to the Offences Against the State Act, that were intended to make it impossible for the Irish resistance to carry on the fight against the British in the North. That legislation was to be rushed through in an atmosphere of panic and exploding bombs as the "black" agents carried out far more serious provocations, killing people in the centre of Dublin.

In the meantime, I was finally arrested myself.

Chapter 19

Arrest and Ordeal

From the end of October 1972, calls for my arrest were carefully built up on both sides of the Irish Sea. I had no doubt about the accuracy of the information that Heath had raised the matter with Lynch when they met in Munich during the Olympic games. They were to meet again in London on November 24 to discuss the promised British White Paper. But the coup that Heath so urgently pressed for had not been achieved. I was still undercover.

Both British and Irish media played a busy part in stoking up the climate that would make the clamour for my arrest appear to be dictated by popular demand. But all this was only the tip of the iceberg. The game being played by Lynch and O'Malley, the Minister of Justice, was a far deeper one.

Phase one was to set up the clamour. Phase two, Lynch was to ask O'Malley why I had not been arrested and charged. O'Malley would reply that the existing laws in the South were not strong enough to guarantee my conviction. Phase three would be to introduce repressive legislation which would extend the Offences Against the State Act until the regime was equipped with more power than the governments of South Africa or Rhodesia.

So there it was. Lynch's target date was his meeting with Heath on November 24, and O'Malley's target for legislation which he had directly associated with my name was the end of the month.

During the early hours of Sunday, November 19, 1972 they finally managed to arrest me.

I was travelling as a passenger in a car in the suburban area of Malahide, on the north side of Dublin Bay. My driver was Joe Cahill. He overshot a turning, and was in the act of reversing when a Special

Branch car pulled up beside us. Two detectives got out. One went to the driver's side. The other came across to mine.

He looked at me for a moment, then said, "Hello, Seán. Give me your full name, please." He searched the glove compartment and the near side of the car's interior. The other detective opened the boot. Then they carried out a personal search of Joe and myself. After looking carefully through my wallet, they handed it back.

"All right," they said. "You can go."

It was a fairly transparent move. As soon as we started off again, it was evident that we were being followed. I decided it was better to leave the car.

I made off on foot towards a hotel. As I entered the grounds I heard shouting behind me. Somebody was chasing me. I ducked around the back of the building. The same detective who had searched me followed me, then drew a pistol.

"Come on out or I'll shoot," he called over to me. "And if I shoot, I'm going to shoot to kill."

I replied, "Look here, Mac, you've just searched me and you know I'm not armed."

"If you don't come out, I'll shoot," the Special Branch man repeated. "I don't care whether you're armed or not."

I came out of where I had been standing. Keeping his pistol pointed right at my chest, the detective ordered me, "Put up your hands."

"Get stuffed," I told him. "I'm not putting my hands up."

Inside ten or fifteen minutes, instructions were radioed back to take me into custody.

"All right, Seán," one detective said. "It's Section Thirty." He was referring to the Offences Against the State Act.

After being held for an hour in Malahide barracks, I was driven into Dublin and taken to the Bridewell. Forty or fifty police were positioned outside or in the yard, and perhaps another twenty in the building itself. There was a buzz of excitement and most of them came over to have a gawk at me.

I was about to be put into a cell upstairs when the two detectives decided to search me again. But I was having none of these Special Branch games. I insisted that everything taken from me would be listed by uniformed Gardai, and a copy of the list of items given to me. No less than three uniformed sergeants formally listed my property and handed me the requested copy. They had found

nothing incriminating, and I had three uniformed witnesses to that fact.

Forty-five minutes after my arrival in the Bridewell, I found myself spending the night in a cell for the first time in nearly fourteen years. As far as penal conditions in Ireland were concerned, time had stood still. The cell was much larger than those I had been in at Wormwood Scrubs, but it was in a dirty and sordid state, with what were obvious bloodstains on the walls. The blankets were filthy and encrusted with every kind of stain you could imagine. It was a waste of time looking for one any cleaner than the rest. I kept on some of my clothes, lay down, and in spite of the primitive bed I soon fell asleep. Not long afterwards the light was switched on. The guard was looking in through the peephole. He did the same every hour or so, waking me each time. It took me back to my first weeks in the Scrubs.

In the morning, Sunday, an orderly offered me what passed for breakfast in the Bridewell, cold-looking tea and a cold packet of sandwiches. I told them I was refusing food and liquids.

An hour or two later, I was taken down to a small room, where Chief Superintendent John Fleming introduced himself as the officer in charge of the Special Branch.

"Have you anything to say to me by way of a statement?" he asked.

"No statement", I said. But I wanted to give him some advice about his trigger-happy men, particularly the detective who had threatened me with a gun the night before.

"If they're so keen to use firearms, they should go up to the North and use them against the British or the RUC or the UDR," I told him.

"Well," said Superintendent Fleming, "if you've got nothing to say to me, then there's no point in my being here." And he left.

In the afternoon, Mary was allowed in to see me in the same room. I looked at her. We were back to square one. The last time we had met in these circumstances was in May 1958.

Mary said the area was stiff with police outside. But she had walked in with a small suitcase. All she had in the case was a clean shirt and underclothes for me. But, as she said herself, "It could have been anything."

I told her I didn't know what was going to happen, but they would have to charge me with something within forty-eight hours or let me go.

I was reading a newspaper in the cell later when I heard the first demonstration outside. Hundreds of people were marching up and down calling for my release. It went on until the early hours of Monday morning. I wanted to overcome the first discomforts of hunger and thirst as much as possible by sleep, and these demonstrators were keeping me awake. But I was pleased to think that they were keeping a lot of politicians and others awake as well.

On Monday morning a Capuchin priest who had been a good friend to Republican prisoners over a long period came in to visit me. I was very pleased to see him, because having embarked on a hunger-and-thirst strike, I wanted a priest to hear my confession. I felt rather better after that.

I next asked to see the barrack orderly. I pointed out to him that I had now been in custody for well over thirty hours. I had originally been held for twenty-four hours only. Was I being released? If not, I wanted a copy of the second detention order.

The cell door had no sooner closed than it opened again. A Gardas sergeant appeared with the notice of extension of custody for a further twenty-four hours. "We didn't want to wake you up at three o'clock in the morning. That's when the first one expired," he explained unconvincingly.

I reminded him that the night watchman had no scruples about waking me up when he banged that peephole and switched on the light every hour or so. "Well, we won't fall out over that," the sergeant said.

It was now after eleven. Revolutionaries hadn't a hope in hell with these finer points of Dublin law, but the fact was that I had been illegally held in the Bridewell for eight hours before they served the second detention order on me.

That night there were more demonstrations. They started at nine pm and continued until three on Tuesday morning, the official deadline when I was supposed to be charged or released. At ten minutes past three, the barrack orderly unlocked the door and said, "Bring your property."

Two detectives were waiting for me right at the foot of the stairs. One introduced himself as Inspector Doucey of the Special Branch.

"Seán," he said, "I'm arresting you under Section Thirty of the Offences Against the State Act, and you are being charged under Section Twenty-one of the Act." He then read out two charges concerning membership of an illegal organisation, and asked if I had anything to say.

“*Tada*,” I said, which in Irish means “Nothing.”

But this was playing ducks and drakes even with the notorious Act in its existing form. It directed that the person held must either be charged within forty-eight hours with an offence before a special criminal or district court, or released from police custody. Neither had been done. The property on the list had not been returned to me, and the second arrest had been made while I was still within the precincts of the Bridewell. The second arrest was bad in law, and should have been deemed so. A police state begins when the police stop obeying the law and do as they like when it suits them. But within a few days the Minister for Justice would be making it a very advanced police state indeed. His bill would abolish the necessity for the police even to prove a political accusation.

I appeared in the Special Criminal Court in Dublin on Tuesday morning. Green Street Courthouse had been the scene of many trials in Irish revolutionary history. It was there that Robert Emmet, the brothers Sheares and the Invincibles of 1880 were sentenced to death by the British. I pointed out that there was no evidence whatsoever to justify an arrest on any of the charges read to me. Accordingly, I had gone on hunger-and-thirst strike from the moment of my arrest, and I intended to continue it.

The prosecution nevertheless requested a lengthy remand. This was to give them time to prepare the “book of evidence.” Citizens of countries where the police are supposed to have evidence *before* a person is arrested may have difficulty grasping this, but the British also resort to such practices.

I rose again and reminded the court that I was not taking food or drink from the moment of my original arrest. If they did not hear the case within a few days, I said, they would have no defendant.

The trial was fixed for that Friday, which was a speed record for the Special Criminal Court. On that very evening, Lynch and Heath would be dining at Downing Street.

The reasons for my strike attributed to me in British and Irish media were stupid and superficial. Some of the Dublin speculation seemed to be written by commentators hardly able to count on their fingers. One writer, again in the *Sunday Independent*, stated that I undertook the strike to speed up the proceedings in a desperate attempt to retain my position in the Republican movement and avoid being replaced by somebody else. Another said I began it in a

fit of temper at having got myself arrested. These fantasies were far from the actual strategy.

Almost twelve months previously, the leadership of the movement had taken a collective decision that if any prominent Republican were arrested on anything but a genuine open-and-shut charge, he would go on hunger-strike. I said at that time that if it happened in my case, I would go on hunger *and* thirst strike. As a jail weapon, it would work faster, for the simple reason that the body can go longer without food than without fluids. The situation we envisaged was that when Lynch and O'Malley eventually fulfilled their threat to introduce the special courts, they would try to launch the new phase of repression with show trials of leading Republicans. This would theoretically impress the British and intimidate the Republican rank-and-file. The strike policy was a counter-tactic. Accordingly, when Lynch and O'Malley proclaimed the setting-up of the special courts, the policy was immediately put into force. O'Connell, myself and other prominent Republicans did not fall into the net, and only Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, his brother Seán and Joe Cahill were arrested in the raids. As soon as they were detained, they began their hunger-strikes. The big show trials never came off. Rúairí was dealt with by a district court in Roscommon. He was acquitted on charges under the Offences Against the State Act after sixteen days without food, and Joe in Dublin after twenty-three. Charges against Seán Ó Brádaigh were withdrawn after he had been nine days without food.

After appearing in court, I was transferred to Mountjoy prison. They put me in a basement cell. A warder handed in some dinner, and I handed it back out again. It was so unappetising in appearance that it kept me from thinking about food for quite a while, though I had become very thirsty.

Two men in civilian clothes came in, the prison governor and his deputy. The governor shook hands with me.

"I'm very sorry to see you in Mountjoy," he said. They were going to move me to a cell on my own in the hospital wing. But as I was breaking regulations by maintaining my strike, I would forfeit normal privileges, apart from being allowed to see my wife.

Mary came in on Tuesday afternoon. She wasn't impressed by the standard of cleanliness in Mountjoy. Apart from the dryness in my mouth, I felt no pain or discomfort yet. I had a headache for a while

in the Bridewell, but that had gone now. It had been mainly due to lack of fresh air for a couple of days.

As soon as the lights went out in the hospital wing, a prisoner sat up in bed and began shouting in the most vile language I had ever heard. He seemed to be mentally deficient. Some of the criminal prisoners shouted back and jeered at him. This went on for a good two hours. To my astonishment, it was taken for granted. It happened every night. Other prisoners joined in, yelling for quiet so that they could get to sleep. I fell asleep myself, with that racket still going on.

The prison had only a part-time doctor, a civilian practitioner who came in every evening and sometimes for half an hour in the mornings. When he examined me on Wednesday morning, I wasn't feeling too bad. It was that night that the first severe pains of the strike began to hit me. They were in the kidneys.

I asked for the doctor. He prescribed a local anaesthetic, a spray that froze the skin and muscles and produced great results. The prison chaplain, Father Billy Farrell, came to see me that night for the first time. "Would you like Communion?" he asked. I said I would, and from then I received it every night in Mountjoy.

During Thursday night my back pains returned more severely, and I had to get the spray treatment again.

Loss of privileges meant that I was only allowed out for a quarter of an hour or twenty minutes' exercise each day, accompanied by two prison officers. I was denied association periods, but two Republican prisoners were allowed to talk to me for about ten minutes every night. Otherwise I was isolated.

On Thursday night I was lying face down on the bed in the cell, trying to take pressure off my increasingly painful kidneys, when the door opened. A prison officer and two detectives stood there. They solemnly handed me what passed for a "book of evidence" that would be presented in court next morning. It was a single foolscap sheet, barely half filled with typewritten lines. After five days, until late on the eve of the trial, this was all they had been able to produce.

After they went, the kidney pains were worse. The only way I could get relief now was to keep moving, walking up and down in my cell. After a couple of hours of this, exhaustion overtook the pain, and I lay on the bed and fell fast asleep.

When I got up on Friday morning, I asked if I could have a hot

bath. It relaxed the muscles and took away some of the biting pain. One of the jeers from the British press was echoed by some Fianna Fáil deputies who were incapable even of thinking on that level unless somebody in England said it first. It was that I was cheating on the thirst strike by drinking my shower water. But the same British mentality that gave itself away in certain “black” propaganda operations in the North had slipped up again. Whoever planted that smear was thinking of British prisons. I was in an Irish one and I never had a shower the entire time I was in Mountjoy, the Bridewell, or the Curragh military hospital. The bath was the only one I had been given in Mountjoy, and I was under the close and watchful eyes of two prison officers the whole time I was in it.

I was taken to Green Street in a big Morris minibus, with several Gardai cars and motorcyclists as an escort. Arriving at the courthouse, I saw that the adjacent streets had all been cleared of traffic and blocked off. There were police everywhere.

I was taken up to the court at eleven o'clock and my trial began. Two charges were read out, dealing with membership of an unlawful organisation and raising and maintaining an armed force contrary to the constitution.

I refused to plead. Justice Griffin entered a plea of not guilty on my behalf. The two judges sat on either side of him, Conroy stout and fleshy, O'Floinn sitting bolt upright with his hands neatly arranged in front of him like a tall sphinx. Neither of them said very much throughout the proceedings.

I was now in the sixth day of the strike, and feeling the effects of it. My voice had dwindled away to a dry whisper from the thirst. I was thinking very much more slowly and had to concentrate hard to follow exchanges. I was physically much weaker now, and even the one-page “book” of evidence was a nuisance to hold. Prison warders sat alongside me. The kidney pain remained quite intense, and I found it distracting and upsetting.

It was in the course of the first day's hearings that the prosecution sought to get evidence against me in the form of a tape recording of an interview which, they alleged, I had given to an RTE radio news feature editor, Kevin O'Kelly. The state called him as a witness under subpoena, along with the RTE director-general, T. P. Hardiman, and the deputy head of news, Desmond Fisher. These were called to obtain physical possession of the tape, have it transcribed, and then introduce the typed manuscript as evidence.

I pointed out that on the night of my arrest I had been searched twice, and that nothing which could be described as incriminating or illegal had been found on me. Now, I said, *after* I had been charged and had been several days in custody, the state were looking for evidence against me. Moreover, I said, it was a special court set up by the most obnoxious piece of legislation. Justice Griffin interrupted to say that he could not allow any Act of the Oireachtas (Parliament) to be described in such a way.

"You are lawyers," I said. "I'm quite sure that as lawyers you have certain attitudes to the evidence that has been presented to you. But I am without liquid and food since Saturday, and if the case goes on much longer you will not have a defendant." I was not only objecting about the tape being introduced as evidence. Apparently it was going to take most of the day to have the transcript typed. I also objected to the state's introduction of two new points as evidence against me, references to speeches I had made in Killarney in October 1971 and in O'Connell Street in Dublin in February 1972. They were really casting around.

When I got back to Mountjoy after the trial adjourned on the first day, I was very weak and groggy. During most of the day I had felt terribly cold in court. That night I had more treatment with the spray. It mastered the kidney pains for a spell, but the freezing effect made me feel even colder. When it wore off, the pains came back. The only thing that kept them in check was to keep moving. I started to walk up and down, up and down the cell until I was once more totally exhausted. When I flopped down on the bed and fell asleep at last it was four am.

Dr Davis, the Mountjoy medical officer, accompanied me to the court next morning. Little sleep and the total shut-off of nourishment were really beginning to make their mark on me now. I was deadly tired, and I was starting to feel like a worn-out grey robot. Communication was very difficult by Saturday. Voices sounded slow and distant, and my own was a dry crackly whisper.

They couldn't hear what I was trying to say in the court and the judges directed that the microphone be passed over to me. I renewed my objections to the use of the tape as evidence, and pointed out that this was the first time that a tape recording had been regarded as admissible in the trial of anyone in Ireland, as distinct from use at a tribunal. The special court was making a fundamental change in the rules of evidence and trying to set up a precedent which was not in

the interests of the community. When I had croaked that out, I felt very dizzy.

The prosecutor was not in a very strong position. He had to cite precedents in English and Australian law. The English case was not a very good example. For one thing, it concerned the use of tape to obtain evidence against policemen suspected of perverting the course of justice. And the part of it which the prosecutor read out in his argument related to the "effect on the jury." Many eyes in the Special Criminal Court automatically went up to the empty rows of jury seats. Under his wig, the prosecutor's neck, from where I was sitting, seemed to be getting a good deal redder.

I intervened to say that I didn't think it should interest an Irish court what procedure had been adopted in England or Australia.

The cold got to me again that day, really badly. They allowed Mary to sit near me on one side, but I kept tilting over towards the doctor. From time to time he rubbed the muscles loose in my neck and gave me a shot of the spray, an instrument which appeared to fascinate the crowded press benches. There were some pretty extraordinary reports of what it contained. I was getting "injections" and God knows what. When my head turned all of a spin, I could feel myself losing balance. Several times I had to lie down along the bench.

Eventually Kevin O'Kelly, the Radio Telefis Eireann journalist, was called as a witness and asked to identify the voice on the tape. I could see from his hands how nervous he was. Eventually, he declined to identify the voice on the grounds of professional ethics, and was sentenced to three months' imprisonment for contempt of court. He, of course, appealed and never served it.

But this caused a jam in the works. The prosecutor stared helplessly at Justice Griffin. His case was starting to crumble. The judge asked what he intended to do now. Instead of entering a *nolle prosequi*, the prosecutor tried to retrieve the situation by a desperate compromise. They would accept an adjournment of my case, and would not press for bail.

Weak as I was, I was not going to have any of this cat-and-mouse stuff. I had been offered bail the day before and said I was not interested. Now they could either make the case stick or they couldn't. I demanded that either the trial be continued or that I be released. I should not be penalised for the state prosecutor's incompetence.

The court instead adjourned for lunch. I could see people shaking

their heads as they pushed their way out of the courtroom through the mass of Special Branch and uniformed Gardai. The general impression was that the state case could not hold. Friends of mine told me later that many British and other foreign correspondents were absolutely staggered by what they had seen. "Well," my friends said to the English observers, "you've been asking all along for measures against Republicans. Now you're seeing them."

There must have been intense legal consultation during the recess. When the court reassembled, Kevin O'Kelly was recalled. He still declined to identify the voice on the tape. But somehow, in spite of his refusal, he had managed to mention my name at least twice in connection with the recording. After a lot of talking and nodding, the judges agreed that the tape was admissible evidence. At that, I said it was obviously a waste of time to object to anything in the Special Criminal Court.

Subsequently, a detective, Garda Kitt, said that in his opinion the voice on the tape was mine. At that moment, I scarcely had a whisper left that could be heard even over the court microphone. But I managed to get him to admit that he had only heard me speak on four or five occasions, the last of them about twelve months previously. But he did not give the date or place of this occasion. Nor did he say he was an expert on voice identification or on tape recordings. The state could produce no supporting evidence that Kitt had *ever* heard me speak.

On the farcical note of a statement by one detective of the lowest rank, it was held that there was sufficient evidence to convict me. Inspector Doucey, the Special Branch officer who had re-arrested me while I was still within the precincts of the Bridewell, now gave details about me.

He said I was born in "Epping, Liverpool." Epping is in London, not Liverpool, and I was not born there. The information he gave the court on at least two other points about me was wrong, although it could have been verified from records in the possession of the Gardai themselves.

I was sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

Now the road was open. O'Malley had already introduced his bill to widen the Offences Against the State Act. If it went through, Republicans could be convicted merely on the *opinion* of a chief superintendent that they were members of the IRA. The opinion itself would be the evidence.

When my conviction had been announced, I summoned my remaining strength and tried to shout to the judges as they rose. Only a faint noise came out: "I'll see you in hell before I submit. I'll probably be dead in six days."

As the three figures in their black gowns filed off the bench, there was a sudden crash of glass above my head. Splinters fell around Mary and me as she came over to embrace me in the well of the court, and somebody in the gallery shouted, "British traitors!" There was a vicious scuffle in the gallery. It was packed with Gardai who had been tensed up for two days. They jumped on several people and gave them a fairly rough mauling. A young Dublin man, a truck-driver as far as I remember, was dragged down to the court. He was charged with throwing a handful of coins in the direction of the bench. My own feeling was that it was a pity it wasn't a handgrenade.

The court was cleared while I was placed on a stretcher and carried through the tunnel for the journey back to Mountjoy. My body felt very peculiar by now. I was cold outside and extremely hot, almost burning, inside. I was giddy, and the kidneys were hurting like hell now. I needed fresh air, and hoped I could dominate the pain if they let me move for a bit.

With two prison officers in close attendance, I was allowed to walk very, very slowly up the yard inside the main gate of the prison. Then they half-carried me back to the governor's office. Father Farrell came in and gave me Holy Communion, a very small fragment of the Host, which I could barely swallow.

I was taken to the Mater Hospital in Dublin. Before we left, I mentioned to Father Farrell that I had met Dr McQuaid, the former Archbishop of Dublin, some time previously and had taken a great liking to him.

"Would you like to see him?" Father Billy asked me.

It had not occurred to me that this was likely, but when I said I would, he went off and arranged it. Dr McQuaid subsequently visited me and gave me absolution. Dr Ryan, who was Archbishop now, came into the hospital the following day and told me that he had said Mass for me and my family that morning. Their visit in no way indicates support for my action in going on this strike, or for the Republican movement. They were two church dignitaries who understood what Christian charity is all about, in visiting a very sick man and giving him spiritual consolation. I was very upset later

when I heard of all the fuss their visit caused, and how it was misrepresented by British and Irish politicians alike.

On Sunday evening an attempt was made to rescue me. I was not aware of it. Mary and one of my daughters were in the ward with me. A uniformed Garda sat inside the door, keeping himself as inconspicuous as possible. Evidently there were armed Special Branch guards outside the door and windows. I imagined I heard some faint reports, but there had been a lot of noise in Dublin that weekend. I learned about the rescue attempt later. A government spokesman said that if I had been removed from the Mater then, it could have had serious consequences for me. It was the end of November, and the temperature in the hospital would have been fairly even. Nevertheless, I felt as if I were burning up in tropical heat far fiercer than any I had known in Jamaica. They brought me two fans, and bowls of ice to put my hands in. The doctor in charge said I should suck some ice, but I refused. It would be tantamount to drinking. The ice didn't stop the burning feeling.

Doctors and other medical staff were coming in and out all the time. I had cardiographs and a lot of other things, and everybody was very kind. But now a strange doctor came in and very abruptly asked my wife to wait outside. Mary said she was usually allowed to stand behind a screen while I was examined. But a detective came and told her she was wanted outside.

This doctor checked me over, saying very little. As soon as he finished, five or six men in plain clothes came quickly into the ward.

"You're going out of here," someone said. They just lifted me out of the bed and carried me out into the corridor, none too gently. I must have had some kind of hallucination, because I felt everything closing in on me and tried to struggle, thinking I would never see Mary again. The next thing I knew, I was halfway over the railings of the staircase, with the floor waving about a long way below. I was pulled back roughly, and now the men around me were in police uniform. The others had vanished.

"Get him out of here as quickly as you can, any way you can," an inspector was barking.

They whipped me off my feet, one man to each limb and a couple more holding me by the body, ran down the stairs with me and shoved me awkwardly into a van. In the general confusion I was kicked several times on the left leg. They sat on me in the van as it

shot away from the hospital and over to Mountjoy. As we reached the prison, we stopped for a moment outside the gate. Inside the van, I was quickly bundled onto a stretcher, then the van drove in. It would look now as if I had been transferred from the hospital in an ordinary manner.

I managed to get my head round until I could look that inspector in the eye.

"You bastard," I said. "I hope you rot in hell."

Inside the prison yard, when the van door opened, the inspector got out hurriedly, white as a sheet.

I was carefully lifted, for the benefit of any senior prison officials who might be watching, and carried across to a helicopter.

By this time, I felt confused. I knew it had begun when they had tricked Mary out of the room, and I was filled with alarm.

"God," I thought. "Am I being handed over to the British?" The way things had been going, dinners in Downing Street and all the rest of it, I would put nothing past the Dublin government. I saw Dr Davis, the medical officer from Mountjoy, inside the helicopter with a uniformed Garda sergeant. Probably the sight of the doctor should have reassured me, but it didn't. They are, I said to myself. They're going to hand me over to the bloody Brits.

I was inside the helicopter on the stretcher now. I asked Dr Davis in a whisper if he would unstrap my feet, which he did. My legs came free as the machine lifted and gained height over north Dublin.

As soon as they were out, I lashed out with my feet in all directions. The strength came from somewhere. I managed to kick the pilot first. Then I kicked the control stick.

"We'll all be killed," Dr Davis yelled.

I'm going to crash it, I decided, crash the whole lot and finish it.

The helicopter shuddered and wobbled quite a bit, but nothing else happened. We were still flying. I found that the sergeant was leaning heavily across me, blocking me with his body from getting near anyone, or anything. They strapped up my feet on to the stretcher again. The sergeant was rather apologetic. I could hear the radio, and somebody talking through it.

I was in an ambulance. There was an Irish NCO in it, with wavy red stripes on his arm, different from the British. He leaned towards me. He was holding a mask.

"Take it easy now," he said. "We'll look after you." It was an oxygen mask. I let him put it on me, and things began to feel better.

I was taken on the stretcher over to a block. They carried me to a door and waited while bolts and locks were opened. Once inside, they carried me along a passage until we came to a cage. They wouldn't open the gate of the cage until the door behind us was bolted again. In the cage were phones, an alarm and an armed military policeman. Beyond the cage was a room with six or seven beds in it. All the windows had iron bars outside. There was another armed military policeman in the room.

I was put into bed. They took my temperature and blood pressure, then took a deep vein blood test, which hurt a good deal. When they finished, a man came over to my bed.

"I'm the doctor in charge of this hospital," he said.

"Would you mind telling me where I am?" I asked him.

He was incredulous. At first he wouldn't believe that I didn't know.

"If I did I wouldn't ask," I said.

"You're in the Curragh military hospital," he replied. The Curragh. The biggest military base in the South. Built by the British and handed over to the Free State army in 1922, it had been an internment camp for political prisoners three times since then.

"What rank are you?" I asked him.

"Lieutenant-colonel."

I was in the detention ward. He asked me to confirm that I was refusing liquid as well as food. I said that was the position.

"How long have you been without them?"

"Nine clear days," I said. He brought up the question of intravenous feeding if I went into a coma. I said I wouldn't authorise it. "Well," he said, "you'll have to sign a document." He went off to get it.

I was still very wobbly physically, getting the kidney stabs all the time. But the oxygen had done my mind a power of good. I could think a bit more clearly now.

The lieutenant-colonel came back after about twenty minutes and handed me the document to sign. It was in English. "I'm not signing this," I said. The constitution said Irish was the first official language, and I always insisted on official documents concerning me being in Irish. It took some hours before the document was brought back to me, retyped in Irish. The lieutenant-colonel didn't want any more embarrassment. He sent another officer in with it, and I put a shaky signature to it. If I did go into a coma, they were going to have a tricky time. But political resistance takes many forms.

My left leg wasn't doing too well, and I got one of the staff to treat the bruises from the scuffle while I was being dragged out of the Mater. The burning feeling inside returned. They gave me some ice, then took it away again. It was causing my temperature to change too rapidly. The organs of my body had nothing to work on. Totally deprived of liquid, they would pack up altogether in about two weeks. Nine from fourteen. I had maybe five days left.

I dozed on and off. Sleep was impossible. During the first night in the detention ward, there was hammering and sawing in the passage outside. Afterwards I learned that they had worked all night building a series of gates and sandbagged positions along the corridor. Infantrymen with automatic rifles were posted behind them. Every night for weeks after that, the noise of these precautions made the place seem more like a foundry than a hospital. Even if my body and brain had been capable of proper sleep, the bedlam would have made it impossible.

Coming on to the tenth day without liquid, the ordinary impulse to urinate was not yet affected, but the fluid itself was thick and there was not much of it. I had to ask for a pot twice during the first night. The armed corporal in charge of the ward refused to hand me in one, saying it was not his duty. Whether this was the man's own miserable nature, the dull-witted fear of taking even this initiative without orders, or the anti-Republican indoctrination which these troops so often showed in their treatment of political prisoners, I didn't know. Anyway, on both occasions I had to wet the bed and wait for the morning. It was a very bad night.

When the lieutenant-colonel came around the next day, he said he would see that instructions were given for me to have a pot when necessary. They took another blood test. It was much more painful than the previous one. The doctor who took it explained that my veins had all but collapsed from lack of liquid.

My wife and my daughter Máire were allowed to see me that day. Mary said she had been very upset at the manner in which I was transferred to an unknown destination. They refused to tell her anything after I was manhandled out of the hospital, and she was extremely worried. She told me that when she eventually found out where I had been taken, she had come down to the Curragh the previous night but had been refused admittance. She and Máire had returned that day with Father Seán McManus, the young Republican priest who had spoken at a huge Dublin protest on my behalf. They

would only allow him as far as the hospital block. He was waiting outside.

My wife brought me messages of good wishes from many people who had got in touch with her. But she said there were also many who were of the opinion that I should give up this thirst strike. We talked of the reason for it all, and of the things I had wanted for Ireland.

"You can only do these things if you live," Mary said quietly. "Live, and do them." She and Máire were massaging my hands and lower arms. Numbness, which had been affecting my calves and feet, was spreading to my other limbs.

While we were talking, every part of my body started shaking. My heart pumped wildly as though it was going to jump through my chest. Mary jumped up and asked the guard in the ward to call a doctor quickly. I remember saying to my daughter, "Get the priest."

An oxygen machine had been brought in that morning and was standing at the foot of the bed. After a few minutes, two nurses came in and tried to get it working. But the pipe was leaking.

Two doctors arrived. There was an argument going on outside the door. Father McManus had followed them in, forcing his way through the cage. The military policeman was trying to stop him. Máire ran over and shouted at the man, "Let him in!"

Father McManus pushed past him and hurried over to me. "Give me absolution or your blessing, quick," I said urgently. He did so. The nurses had got the machine going properly at last. They got the mask on me, but by that time the attack had passed. One of the doctors stuck a needle in my arm. My daughter was berating the military police corporal. "You ought to be ashamed of yourself, sitting there with your gun instead of being up in the North," she flung at him. "It's your war too."

She got the standard reply, "I'm only doing my job, Miss."

The shaking ceased and I began to recover as soon as the oxygen began reaching me. My wife went over and talked to the two doctors. Apparently it had not been a heart attack as I had believed, but a rigor.

When things calmed down, Father McManus sat down beside me and began to talk in a low, earnest tone.

"Now, Seán, listen to me," he began. "The position is this. You are very ill. If you don't drink tonight, you will probably die tomorrow or the day after."

“You don’t know what the situation is outside. There are demonstrations all over the country on your behalf, and the mood of the demonstrators is very ugly. If you go on with this and you die very soon, there will be riots. There will be a lot of bloodshed, and many people will be arrested, hurt, or even killed. Do you want that?”

He was putting me in a hell of a spot. I had been able to get a message out asking that protests should be disciplined and dignified. It had been read out at the massive demonstration in which twelve thousand people filled O’Connell Street for a meeting followed by a march through the city on Sunday night. But the government had called out armed troops who had taken up positions around Mountjoy prison and the Mater hospital. The media next morning talked of “riot gear” but the troops had been armed to the teeth with FN rifles and sub-machine guns. They took over the Garda station beside the prison, and every window in it was filled with soldiers watching the crowds. Political tension had not been so high in Dublin for decades. These troops were completely inexperienced in serious riot situations on the Northern scale. If there were outbreaks over my death, far bigger and angrier crowds would take to the streets. Bloodshed in the South would have heavy repercussions, with general bitterness and division, and there would be untold consequences for the Republican movement.

“That is the position,” the young priest said again. “You don’t want that down here.”

“No. I don’t want that.”

“Well, if you don’t drink tonight, Seán, you are going to die very soon. Then there *will* be bloodshed.”

I asked to talk to the lieutenant-colonel. When he came over, I got Father McManus to repeat his assessment. Then I asked the officer if he agreed with it. He told us he did.

“In that case,” I said, “I will end my thirst strike. But I will continue on hunger strike.” I asked to see three of my comrades from the “glasshouse.” Republican prisoners had been transferred to military custody at the Curragh after their jail-fighter tactics had half-wrecked part of Mountjoy.

“Can that be arranged?” I asked. The officer said that, under the circumstances, he thought it could be. I asked to see Liam Fagan, Kevin Mallon from Tyrone and Barney McLaughlin. They were serving sentences ranging from nine months to three years, and they

all had experience of hunger strikes to obtain political treatment.

The three were brought into the ward under heavy armed escort, handcuffed to military policemen. They were very concerned when they saw my condition. Mary told them I was coming off the thirst strike. I had three Republican witnesses to counter any "black" propaganda attempts (and there were plenty afterwards) to misrepresent my motives and my actual state of health to members of the movement.

"Are you coming off the thirst strike?" one of them said. "The rockets have been going off all day."

The new RPG7 rocket launchers had come into action in a co-ordinated wave of IRA attacks across the North that day. Two British soldiers and an RUC man had been killed. The British were flabbergasted by the sudden appearance of these weapons in numbers.

"We're going to win this thing."

"Of course we're going to win," I said.

The military police didn't like that. After two or three minutes they took the lads back to the glasshouse.

I asked Father McManus to make it known why I had ended my thirst strike. He undertook to do so.

I got a message out through another line too. It was widely published next day. In it, I said, "I want all protests to be peaceful, by which I mean no rioting, no stone-throwing, no abuse or name-calling of Twenty-Six County forces. The fight is centred in the North and must be kept there. I do not want anybody hurt or blood spilled on my behalf in the Twenty-Six Counties. That is why I am taking liquids."

When I was satisfied that my motives were not in doubt to anyone immediately present, I accepted my first taste of liquid in ten days, much to the relief of my wife and daughter and the priest.

I felt no immediate difference. Later that night I had another rigor. It was not as bad as the previous one, but once again I didn't know whether my heart had decided to give up under the strain I had put on it. There was nobody in the ward, except the armed corporal and the other one in the cage. Again, it was several minutes before someone came in and put the oxygen mask on me. At eight o'clock the next morning, I had a third rigor.

It was Wednesday. During the day I felt better. I was on a diet now of one spoon of glucose to a pint of water. In the Dáil, Lynch

had said there was absolutely no possibility of Seán MacStiofáin being released on health and humanitarian grounds. But I hadn't appealed to be released. I was keeping up the hunger strike as a protest against my arrest and detention, and as a protest against the collaboration between the Dublin government and the British occupation authorities. You can't live on water alone for many months. All the glucose does is to gain you an additional couple of weeks. That stretches out the period of the hunger strike until even the establishment media have to report the number of days you have been on it. If they don't, the regime has even more problems with rumours. It was politically dangerous for Dublin to permit forcible feeding on Republican prisoners, and I knew they would not risk it. The Fianna Fáil crowd knew these tactics as well as Republicans but there were very few answers to them that wouldn't be politically counter-productive.

The authorities let my whole family visit because, while I was a little better on the eleventh day, I was by no means out of danger. My daughter Catherine and her husband, my baby daughter Sinéad and my little grandson were admitted this time and stayed for some hours. I pointed out to the colonel that there was no medical orderly available when I suffered the second rigor during the night. After a long argument, they brought in a retired nursing sister on night duty in the detention ward, and I must record that she was immensely kind to me.

My condition had deteriorated greatly since the night of my arrest. When they brought in a weighing machine that Wednesday, I found I had lost more than seventeen pounds in eleven days.

A captain came in. He said he was the deputy governor and asked if I had any complaints. I said that my principal complaint was being in custody at all. That was none of his business, he said.

I was able to take notice of details again by now. I studied my surroundings and the routines of the guards. Since my arrival in the ward, all the windows had been painted over white, and barbed wire put thickly across the bars. Later, the windows were sandbagged and the entire block surrounded with barbed wire. The windows were similarly treated in the toilet and bathroom off the ward, which were kept locked for all but a few minutes each day. The hospital building was isolated and ringed by armed sentries. I could hear the noise as they were changed outside. There was shouting and challenging all day long by those in the passage. "Halt. Advance and be recognised.

Password.” All this kind of stuff went on every time hospital staff, nurses or anyone else went in or out. The sentries, I discovered, were mostly very young and nervous.

Mary said that those at each of the new wooden doors in the passage kept their automatic rifles pointing at her and Sinéad as they went through. When the child was covered by the weapons, she put her hands up in front of her face. She became shy and frightened.

On Friday, December 1, the night corporals coming on told the sister in the detention ward about the bombs that had exploded in Dublin. Few bombs in history have been better timed. O'Malley's attempt to hustle his bill through the Dáil had encountered a great deal of opposition inside and outside the house. The Labour Party had called the new Offences Against the State measure a “move towards totalitarianism.” The right-wingers in Fine Gael, the main opposition party, dearly wanted to quench Republicanism in Ireland. But the prospect of defeating the Fianna Fáil government by voting against their political principles was even more tempting to some of them. They were all still at it hammer and tongs when the bombs went off near the trade union headquarters, Liberty Hall. Two people were killed and one hundred and twenty-seven injured. In Belfast, the UDA denied responsibility for the Dublin explosions — and blamed the Provisional IRA. Dublin was said to be in panic and confusion.

The level of political sophistication wasn't too high around me that night. One of the corporals asked me if I approved of bombings in the city. I said I did not, and that I was quite positive that the Republican movement was not responsible. The corporal, a couple of other military policemen, two nurses and a medical orderly were very sceptical until I got them to think about the question: “Who stands to gain from such a bombing?” Republicans had nothing whatever to gain, and a lot to lose if such a bill went through and made convictions virtually automatic for people charged with membership of an illegal organisation. It was the British who stood to gain if the bill was passed, for such action was exactly what they wanted in the South.

One of the military policemen considered this, then asked if I would give him a straight answer to a straight question: if the Republican movement *were* responsible, what would my reaction be?

I said I would dissociate myself immediately from any such action. But, I said, nobody in the Republican leadership would sanction, nor

would any member want to carry out, such insane action as a deliberate terror bombing of Dublin civilians. I told him that the movement had never deliberately bombed civilians in the North, either. Eventually, they saw the logic of the situation and accepted my arguments. But I was a very disturbed man when I finally got to sleep that night. The midnight team coming on told me enough news for me to realise that the bill was getting through in the panic. In fact, Fine Gael withdrew its opposition to it, and the final stage of the OAS Bill was passed by sixty-nine votes to twenty-two, with the Dáil sitting until four o'clock on Saturday morning.

I was given a stack of letters, telegrams, Mass cards and so on. The majority expressed support and solidarity. Many of the letters appealed sincerely to me to abandon my strike. "Don't die for Ireland," was the general theme. "We want you to live for her."

But some messages were in the opposite vein. A few particularly caught my eye. A Mass card had been desecrated into a curse. Some of my correspondents had changed the sentiments on get-well cards into the exact reverse. "Die, you bastard, die," one of them now read. Perhaps the strangest insult was, "You're a bigger coward than the Kennedy brothers." I have heard the Kennedy men criticised on many scores, but lack of courage can hardly be laid at their door.

Dying, in spite of Lynch's statement to the Dáil that release was out of the question, was the last thing the politicians wanted me to do. There was uproar enough in the South, with the demonstrations, the Dublin bomb provocations, the bill which a Labour deputy described as "fascist in content, if not in intent." My show trial was over, for better or worse. Alive, they had me out of the way. Dead, I would become their greatest problem.

I did not want to die myself unless I had to, although I was well prepared to by now. When a hunger strike is preceded by a thirst strike, obviously an enormous strain has been placed on the system to begin with. After the three rigors, each of which felt like my last moment, I knew I could not control what would happen. The doctors had told me that the lack of liquid had revived and intensified a kidney condition which they put down to my previous years in prison.

I kept up my hunger strike for the next eight weeks. I received Communion every morning. I was able to walk from my bed to a

chair in the ward, and I would read the books which Mary brought in for me. After she left, I would read the three newspapers which the guards brought in when they changed shifts at one o'clock. I kept a press file to check and keep abreast of outside events.

After my third week, coming on to Christmas, they started a sort of persuasion blitz on me, trying to get me to accept solid food. When I refused, the matron and assistant matron of the military hospital suggested, "How about taking Complan?" I said people took that as a slimming food. I was going to be slim enough when this ended, one way or another.

At the end of the fourth week, the lieutenant-colonel asked me did I not think honour had been satisfied by now.

"No," I said simply. He left it at that and did not pursue the point.

On Christmas Eve, into the fifth week, I collapsed for the first time. There was a big red flash. I blacked out for a moment and tumbled. I must have stuck out my hands from instinct to break the fall. When I came to a moment later I was supporting myself on all fours. I had the red flashes four or five times more after that, winding up on my hands and knees in the same way each time, but never fully losing consciousness. There was a lot of giddiness during the daytime now, and walking up and down the ward came to be a rather chancy proposition.

Just before Christmas, the corporal came in from the cage to go to the toilet at the other end of the ward. He unbelted his pistol as he went across. But the lanyard got caught in something, and he dropped the gun.

"It'd been too bad if that had gone off and I got shot," I said to him. "Nobody would have believed it was an accident."

I think it was Christmas Eve too that I heard a sharp burst of fire just outside in the grounds of the hospital block. I waited with interest for further developments, but there were no more shots. Later I learned that an NCO had dropped his sub machine-gun, and it had fired when it hit the ground. With guards like this around, I hardly needed enemies.

I was very uncertain what lay ahead now. The original sentence could mean anything or nothing, with the kind of legislation that was coming in these days. I had no real idea when I would be released, or whether I would leave the Curragh on my feet, on a stretcher or in a coffin. I was sorry for Mary. It wasn't much of a Christmas for her or

my daughters at home. She was working as hard as she could to back me up and get maximum publicity for my strike.

But people all over the world seemed to know about it. I got hundreds of cards from Sweden, America, Australia and many other places, as well as a deluge from all parts of Ireland.

Three greetings that gave me particular pleasure were a letter of support from the revolutionary freedom fighters of the Breton Republican Army, another from the Welsh Political Prisoners' Committee, and one from a lawyer in Tennessee who was defending American blacks asserting their right to attend university. I wrote back to him with gratitude, assuring him of my solidarity with all black people and telling him of my full support for racial equality.

Another letter which I greatly appreciated during my hunger strike was one from the famous American Jesuit, Father Daniel Berrigan, who himself had been on the run, in prison and on hunger strike as a result of his anti-Vietnam War activities. The renewed heavy bombing of Vietnam around that time appalled me. But just as the determination of the Vietnamese brought about at least an American disengagement, equal determination on the part of the Irish people will lead to a British disengagement in Ireland — providing the people follow the lead of the revolutionary movement.

My relations with my guards varied. They had orders not to speak to me unless absolutely necessary. But if the two who happened to be on duty could trust each other, this rule was not followed too closely. One of them very occasionally brought in a transistor radio, and I heard the news and kept in touch with Irish language programmes. I had asked for one of my own but this had been refused, although officialdom knew I was on my own in the ward and the guards had been ordered not to converse with me.

But they were all fairly civil. And some I got to know quite well. One of the military policemen told me seriously, "If I thought your death on hunger strike would cause a civil war in Ireland, I'd shoot you."

This seemed to be a peculiar way to avert civil war, and I pointed out the flaw in it.

"Yes," he said mysteriously, "but I've also thought of that. I have my theories on the subject." We never developed them.

Most of the guards were in military service for employment, and several found life in the military police corps distasteful. You cannot always tell about redcaps, in spite of their unpopularity with troops

in most armies. Some of those who guarded me turned out to be more sensitive than you would imagine. Afterwards, their fellow policemen told me they had been nervous sitting in the detention ward for hour after hour with nothing to do but watch the only other person in there literally fading away in front of them.

Propaganda against me was built up in various ways to counter sympathy for my hunger strike. One Dublin Sunday newspaper ran a long and scurrilous attack on myself and my family background by an "Allan Jones" (who to my certain knowledge did not exist).

A hunger strike is a two-sided weapon, and it does not work well unless those inside and outside the jail play their part with equal determination. Mine was not getting the usual degree of support given to hunger strikes in the Republican movement. The leadership of the movement was completely undercover since the passage of the OAS amendments, and with good reason. Dave O'Connell evaded arrest by a hair's breadth, but on December 29 Ruairí Ó Brádaigh was arrested in Dublin. On the last day of the year Derry suffered a sore loss when Martin McGuinness was arrested in Donegal.

I accepted without question that the resistance in the North must come before all else, and for a while the movement was being hard-pressed while it readjusted to these new pressures. As I have said often, a guerrilla conflict ebbs and flows. In these circumstances, the regular press statements and bulletins about my progress and my condition dried up. The result was that my wife Mary took on the effort on my behalf, contacting international sympathisers, holding a press conference at which she did very well indeed.

Repeatedly I thought of the many thousands of political prisoners all over the world, of the Rhodesian mentioned by Judith Todd who had been in detention for fifteen years, of the Greek patriots tortured by the brutish secret police of the colonels' regime, of those in the prisons of the Portuguese in Mozambique and Angola, of the victims of the Bureau of State Security in South Africa, of the endless prison wastes and now the psychiatric hospitals awaiting dissenters in Eastern Europe, of the inhuman savagery used by corrupt Latin American regimes on the captured guerrillas who had fought to raise their people from the dust. And I thought of our own lads in the glasshouse here on the Curragh, of those in the prisons of England, in Crumlin, and in the bleak mud and snow behind the wire of Britain's latest concentration camp, Long Kesh. I prayed for them

every night, and I prayed for their oppressed peoples, that they would throw off the imperialism and the economic exploitation and walk free, as we wanted to in the land we loved. It was for that love, and nothing else, that every one of us had fought and suffered.

Those thousands upon thousands of patriotic revolutionaries out there across the world beyond the plains of the Curragh were not mad.

Nor were we. And you know it.

It was forty-nine days now. I was feeling weak, but not in too much discomfort. I was very thin, for me.

Mary came in, upset. "There are some people outside who can't get to your funeral quick enough," she said. She had heard criticism of me among some Republicans because I was taking glucose in the water.

"If that's the case," I said tiredly, "I'll cut out the glucose."

I did. I informed the hospital authorities I would no longer be taking it in the water. But I felt bitter now. As I said, glucose or not, water wouldn't keep me alive indefinitely. All I ever thought the stuff would do was to gain me an additional fortnight or so. Another fortnight for those critics outside to stop the idle, malicious gossip and get results with the back-up campaign. Each revolutionary success is an encouragement and in a way a triumph for *all* freedom fighters and all resistance movements. Each failure is a defeat for the many.

I weakened and went downhill very fast after that. The day I went back to plain water, not even adding salt as so many hunger strikers do, the military authorities used a very mean bit of leverage on me. They sent down another Republican prisoner, a young Dublin man who was having an operation. They served him three or four meals a day, and fairly good food too. He had no doubt himself that he had been sent for his operation at that particular time for more than medical reasons. His name was Tony Weldon. There was another detention ward but they put him in with me.

Tony wouldn't play. When they brought him food, he would take it over to a corner of the ward and eat it out of my sight.

Within a couple of days of his arrival, he said, 'God, Seán, the flesh is melting off you.' I was having giddy spells twice, three times a day. I collapsed several times, and now I could only walk out to the

toilet with support. I found reading impossible, and mental effort increasingly difficult.

At the beginning of the ninth week, Mary was very alarmed. She noticed the deterioration. And I was now conscious of the effect of it all on her. She had lost a lot of weight too, but that Monday she looked at the end of her tether. I was worried that my wife would crack up under the strain of the whole business. It was worse for her than for me. I was reconciled to dying under it if I must, but Mary could hardly be expected to feel the same way.

Half an hour after midnight on the fifty-ninth day, I was settling down to try and sleep when I heard the usual racket in the passage and finally the cage door opening. It was one of the military chaplains. I sensed that something was up.

This chaplain and I had spoken together in Irish from time to time. It was in Irish that he told me now that during the evening he had received a phone call from a priest in Dublin whom he did not wish to name. The priest told him that something of interest about myself would be broadcast in the RTE late night news. He had listened for it.

The chaplain told me that a statement from the leadership of the movement had been issued through the Irish Republican Publicity Bureau. It said that I had been ordered off hunger strike.

I thanked him for coming over late at night to let me know. The chaplain asked me what I was going to do now.

"Obey," I said.

The night sister came in, delighted. "Isn't it great news," she said. She brought me a cup of tea. It tasted very good.

Next day a senior member of the hospital staff told me that, in their estimation, I would not have survived beyond the following weekend. The consensus was that I had three to five days of life left when I was ordered off my strike.

I had been closer to the final edge than I realised. I had lost fifty-six pounds.

It had taken twenty military policemen and four full infantry platoons *per day* to guard the hospital building while I was in it, that is almost one hundred and fifty troops every twenty-four hours for the time I was there. That amounts to a staggering number of man-hours in military economics, and it was fairly certain that some newspapers or a Dáil deputy would get around to making an issue of

it if it had gone on much longer. I have no doubt that this was the main reason why I was rushed out of the military hospital with practically no time to recuperate, unlike the usual practice with hunger strikers.

Inside a few days I was transferred to the glasshouse to join Ruairí Ó Brádaigh, Martin McGuinness and Joe McCallion from Derry, Richard Behal of Kilkenny, Seán Meehan from Belfast, and many more Republicans. But my experiences there, in the British-built prison where an Irish government held members of the Irish resistance movement, are best told at a time when they are less likely to expose Republicans concerned to the spite of jailers, North or South.

The IRA fought on.

On a spring morning that year, the prison gate was unlocked once more in my life. I stepped out gladly, but very stiffly. The left side of my body was partly numbed, and it was to take me many months of convalescence, Mary's care and rest before I recovered from the effects of my hunger-and-thirst strike. There was a buzzing in my ears. An honest specialist told me later, "If there was any cure for buzzing in the ears, I'd have made my fortune by now."

Mary was waiting outside the military prison with my son-in-law, who had brought his car to collect me. We were escorted off the Curragh base by a military police landrover, then followed by forty or fifty reporters and cameramen. We had to stop and give an impromptu press conference. The grass never smelled so sweet, or the air so fresh, in the light morning breeze near trees on the plain of Kildare.

Questions came from all angles. What were conditions like in the Curragh detention centre?

"It's a powder keg," I said, telling them of the growing resentment of the Republican prisoners.

Where would we be going now? Had I formed any new views about the Provisional IRA? Had I changed my mind about the movement when I was in there?

"I came out of the Curragh what I was when I went in," I said. And I might have added, for twenty-four years before that. "An unrepentant Republican separatist."

Then I went home. For the time being.

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