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1. DEMOCRACY

According to *The Times*, every opinion poll on the subject conducted in Britain since June, 1974, has shown a majority in favour of withdrawal from Northern Ireland. The latest, conducted by Gallup, has found that 55% of those questioned favour either an immediate withdrawal or a phased withdrawal over a maximum period of five years. Only 28% believe that troops should remain in Northern Ireland until an agreed settlement has been reached.

The poll also found that 54% of those surveyed rate Northern Ireland as a very important political issue in Britain. By contrast, 46% said race relations was a very important issue and only 6% said Scottish devolution was a very important issue.

The degree of public concern about the North has surprised political observers and it contrasts starkly with the attitude of the various political parties—none of whom considers the North a political issue or an election issue.

Roy Mason has clearly been disturbed by it all—to such an extent that he has resurrected the long-discarded proposition that, in the event of troop withdrawal the subsequent violence in the North "could easily spread to the major cities of the mainland with their large Irish populations". That he has nothing more intelligent to say is, of course, in keeping with his unlightened stewardship of the North.

As might be expected, *The Times* displayed considerably greater brain-power. In a leading article recently it admitted a majority of public opinion in favour of withdrawal but then went on to pose to John Pardoe and such people a series of questions on who would administer the North after withdrawal.

The article finished as follows: "If a province which has been fully part of the United Kingdom for 178 years, and which contains a consistent majority in favour of remaining so, has the civil and military authority of the state withdrawn from it, how is that to be described other than as expulsion from the kingdom? By what principle is expulsion of a province from the kingdom justified?"

LOGICAL

These are valid questions which must be answered if withdrawal is to appear logical in an intelligent British context.

Taking the last question first: By what principle is expulsion of a province from the kingdom justified? The answer is surely that it is justified on the same principle as was used to create it—namely expedience. Originally Northern Ireland was to have been the historic nine-county province of

Ulster but Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan were discarded because it was feared that there wouldn't be a permanent majority in favour of the union with Britain. In other words there is no admirable principle involved—only deceit, sectarianism and colonialism. There is no honour to be lost in righting an injustice.

As for democracy, surely *The Times* is not proposing that the wishes of the sixty million people who reside in these islands are to be frustrated by the prejudices of less than one million Unionists whose only motivation is concern at a loss of powers and privilege?

Anyway, the Unionist population about which *The Times* is so concerned has long ago fragmented. One section is openly anti-British and working for an independent Northern Ireland. Other less political members of the majority community in the North are acquiring an increasingly open mind and will go for the best deal offered them. This particularly applies to sections of the farming and business community. They are fed up with violence and would opt for any reasonable arrangement which offered peace and commercial advantage.

The point is that the old Unionist monolith, which *The Times* has supported down the years, is shattered. If offered a better deal a clear majority of people in Northern Ireland would bid farewell to Britain in the morning.

DISENGAGEMENT

But the other question is a far more serious one: What happens if there is no agreement in the North prior to British withdrawal? Incidentally, the Gallup poll was quite specific in identifying "withdrawal as complete British disengagement from Northern Ireland—and not simply troop withdrawal, with Northern Ireland still remaining in the Union as is sometimes understood.

The problem here is that the cart is being put before the horse. The general proposition is that a date now be set for, say, five years hence when Britain would end its involvement in Northern Ireland. This gives all concerned five years to agree. More to the point, it puts all the necessary pressure on them to work out an agreement. Indeed, it seems obvious that only in such a situation will a workable agreement emerge.

The people of Northern Ireland (or Ireland as a whole) are not fresh from the bush. They are as socially enlightened as the people of Britain. Quite remarkably, there is no East-West conflict—no significant Marxist section of the population seeking to grab power. The row down the centuries has had to do with Britain—a minority section of the island's population (historically speaking the settler community in one corner of the island) wishing to maintain its link with Britain. But with Britain having announced that the link is being finally cut on a certain date, the very nature of the conflict changes instantly.

Confronted with a final British withdrawal five years hence, the people then have a number of choices—a united Ireland; some sort of a federal arrangement or an independent Northern Ireland. More immediately, the military conflict between the IRA and British military forces is at an end.

REALISTIC

In other words a firm declaration of withdrawal means an end to violence—to be replaced by realistic negotiations against a five-year time-scale. There would,

no doubt, be much thundering and threats but everybody would know that in the end some sort of a solution would have to be reached. Furthermore, there would be plenty of inducements. The United States has made promises, the EEC would also have every reason to wave it cheque book, while the British taxpayer, who is currently paying out more than £2 a day to sustain the chaos in the North, would have no objection to making a contribution. Dublin's generosity is already guaranteed.

What the final shape of things would be should not concern us too much at this stage. Indeed, most of us are open-minded enough to accept any shape of things which would, once and for all, bring an end to the centuries-old Anglo-Irish conflict. That is the proposition contained in the call for withdrawal as expressed at some length by such as John Pardoe and historian A.J.P. Taylor—and clearly approved of by a majority of people in Britain and in Ireland. What remains to be seen is the extent to which politicians in these islands, and particularly in Britain, are responsive to the will of the people.

2 ON MEDIA MANIPULATION

The increasing importance of the mass media in reinforcing the forces of change has been recognised for a long time. Even Pearse and his comrades realised that there was little point in spilling your blood in Dublin in 1916 if the world did not come to learn of it. The development of television, in particular, has been important. There are those who argue that, in the end, it was television which ensured the defeat of the United States in Vietnam. President Johnson used to talk of the difficulties of winning a war "which is written in the wind", not in the jungles of South-East Asia, but in the livingrooms of the folks back home.

Similarly it can be said that, in Ireland, television opened the conspiracy of silence about Northern Ireland in the second half of the 1960s. Many of us still find it difficult to come to grips with the realities. Many dreams, myths, hopes and ideals have been shattered in the violence of the past ten years. Views and positions have been altered because of the decade, some may say not sufficiently so to ensure peace. Is everybody all that wiser, or is it a case of more and more groups sulking in their respective dug-outs?

It is difficult to answer that question. Oddly enough, we feel the reason is due to the fact that in the 1970s television and radio, under increasing pressure from governments who found the going, and their own handling of the situation in the present inadequate, were forced if not to capitulate entirely, at least to lay off those controversial but crucially important areas of Northern Ireland life which have been brought out into the open, thrashed out, and, if necessary, changed or abolished, before real peace can be established.

It is generally accepted that the bloody attack on a Civil Rights march in Derry on October 5th, 1968, started a ball rolling which has not stopped since. Some would argue that the whole sorry mess goes back to 1920-21, if not 1690 or even 1169! Even excluding those, it is true to say that October 5th, '68, was not the start. There had been the Co. Tyrone Civil Rights march earlier that summer, while Catholics had been killed in sectarian attacks in Belfast as early as 1966. What was important about Derry was the massive presence of the world press, and in particular that now historic piece of RTE Newsfilm which

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showed up the "law and order" tactics of the RUC for what they were. This brutality was nothing new to Northern Catholics. It had been going on for generations. What was important was that the rest of Ireland, and the world, saw it, in most cases for the first time. Truly, it can be claimed that it was a piece of newsfilm which changed the course of Irish history.

Lots of sad and bloody history has been written in the ten years since then. We do not accept that people have lost interest, or despaired, or that we are incapable of a just and lasting solution. It is the failure to work even harder or real solutions that causes the despair. And forcing television crews to "lay off" does not make the problems go away. We have seen some revival of serious interest in the North on RTE in the past month. Ironically enough most of the films were borrowed from the BBC. It is high time we openly declared that we wanted to hear more open, frank and realistic accounts of all dimensions of the Northern monster, in order to form honest evaluations of what can be done. Media manipulation can work in several directions. And the sin of neglect is the most dangerous of all in this regard. That much at least, should be clear from the events of the past ten years.

3. SPEECHES FROM DERRY'S ANNIVERSARY MARCH

The following are extracts from the speeches of the platform speakers made at the tenth anniversary of the October '68 Civil Rights March in Derry. The commemoration held on October 8th last was organised by Sinn Fein.

Johnny Johnson, Chairman Derry Sinn Fein, said: "The march that couldn't take place ten years ago happened today. The reason why it happened today is because the Brits couldn't stop it. With all their soldiers, guns and tanks they couldn't hold down the risen Republican people.

"We must maximise our efforts to end British tyranny. At the present minute they are building a massive gaol a Maghaberry near Long Kesh. There will be 2,000 cells in this prison. You know who will fill these cells—Your sons and daughters. We must end British rule to end the perpetual misery Republicans suffer, every generation, of going to gaol".

Andreas O Callaghain, Sinn Fein Executive, said: "When I saw the film of the baton wielding thugs of the RUC beating marchers into the ground ten years ago I was at college reading about the period of 1916-'21. I said to myself—these people can do one of two things, they can either lie down under the jackboot of repression and fawn for mercy or stand up and fight and hit back. I'm glad to say, you did just that.

"No one in this country seriously believes that the struggle being waged today is simply about houses and jobs. In '68 the issues of housing and jobs were the most blatant areas of neglect. By challenging them as the marchers of '68 did, brought out the true nature of the struggle. Namely that of a colonial war, against an occupying army.

"The Brits have been kicked out of their other colonies and we'll see to it they're kicked out of here.

"The Republican Movement has remained invincible and has grown in strength over the last ten years because it could not be bought on the question of our country's freedom. The motto of our movement to quote the greatest Irish revolutionary Republican Socialist this century, James Connolly, is 'Words when words suffice, arms when arms demand'.

"We have not let the men of 1916 down nor the struggling masses of '68. Our struggle for freedom today follows a line of continuity dating back to the 1916 period and beyond. And you can rest assured that with a few more demonstra-

tions as big as today's and with the active assistance of a few M60's we'll finish the job once and for all".

Michael Farrell, Organiser October '68 March, said: "Today's struggle is the logical continuation of that begun back in '68. The reaction from the carpet-baggers in the SDLP to the growing resistance on the streets is typical of a party who no longer represent the interest of the working class people of this area.

"The experience the people have had over the last ten years especially of controlling their own lives during the 'no go' area in Derry and Belfast threaten the power politics the SDLP engage in. They try to cover this by claiming that the struggle is different.

"But remember the SDLP didn't start the civil rights movement. It was a handful of Republicans and socialist activists.

"The SDLP climbed to power on the people's back. The SDLP fear you more than anything else, they are terrified of the people taking decisions on their own and coming out on the streets.

"H-Block struggle has brought the people back out again. We must ensure that the struggle to end the prisoners' misery is successful and is the foundation to move forward to end British rule in this country".

Eamonn McCann, Organiser October '68 March, said: "Over the last few days those of you who have had the singular misfortune to be listening to the news reports or reading the newspapers would think that this march today had nothing to do with the one ten years ago, but on this platform and in this crowd are the original organisers of that march.

"The people like Hume, Cooper and Fitt who claim that the struggle today is different were nonentities when we set out on the first march. They climbed to power on the backs of the suffering people. They didn't invent civil rights—civil rights invented them. They have stabbed the people in the back. But some things have changed.

"The demands of the protesting people are different today than ten years ago. Then we were naive. We asked for simple basic things like houses and jobs, we were bated into the ground. Then our eyes were closed, today our eyes are open.

"We now realise that the six county state is irreformable—it must be smashed. Ten years ago Catholics couldn't get houses because of Unionist controlled councils. Today the Unionists are on the march to stop Catholics being housed in West Belfast. Led by Molyneaux, they haven't budged an inch. This statelet preserves their privilege.

"There cannot be any dispute that to the fore in trying to smash British imperialism in this country is the IRA. They are the inheritors of the struggle which began in Derry city on October 5th, 1968".

Kevin Agnew, Sinn Fein Executive and Organiser October '68 March, said: "Fellow Republicans of the North, ten years ago a small dedicated group of people set out to march from Duke Street to this Square in defiance of a ban slapped on the march by the Orange junta ruling from Stormont. They were bated into the ground having walked only two hundred yards.

"Since then we have marched in defiance of British rule all over the occupied North. Today we marched again in defiance of the British, but today we are victorious.

"We have shown the British and their Loyalist allies that we are more determined than we were ten years ago to end the injustice of their occupation of our country.

"To those who say things have changed we say, open your eyes, face reality, today we have more repression than ever before. Hundreds of men lie naked in appalling conditions, every RUC barracks is a torture centre and hundreds of people are arrested and dragged off to

gaol on trumped-up charges. All of this is carried out to keep these Six Counties British.

"We are told by the scavengers of the SDLP that things have changed. For them yes, they have. Now they can sit in the Guildhall with their Loyalist cohorts, dividing the spoils from the tax paying people of this city, but the flag that flies over this building is still the Union Jack and as long as that is so nothing will have changed.

"Ten years ago our battle cry was *We shall overcome*; today it is *Up the Provos*".

Mary Nellis, Derry Relatives Action Committee, said she has two sons in gaol, one on the blanket almost two years, the other on remand. She recently sent her other son south of the border because of threats by the Brits.

"Free people of Ireland, it's a long time since this square has been filled to the capacity it is today. Your turnout is testament to the unquenching support the prisoners on the blanket have. When they hear about this turnout they will be overwhelmed.

"The last ten years of our freedom struggle has changed my life entirely. On October 5th, '68, I had my two sons, Denis who was then 10 and John who was 7 at confessions in the local chapel. I was praying that that day's demonstration would be successful. You all know what happened. You alone know that out of the events of October '68 the SDLP were born.

"I was once a member of that party, because I believed they were a party for the people. But I now know they are not. They have repeatedly sold the people out for meagre crumbs from their masters' table. They have aided the torturers of our sons and daughters. Their statement on the H-Blocks a few weeks ago was apologetic for the Brits torturing our sons. You know what they have done to the suffering Republican people. I appeal to you never again vote for them in any election.

"John Hume has closed his eyes and ears to the British torture. He thinks he is getting a seat in Europe. Well I have a message for John Hume. I, an ex-member of your party will see to it that you will be defeated in the European election. You won't get a vote from the mothers or fathers of the victims who have been tortured by the British forces".

4. THE PURVEYORS OF VIOLENCE

Q. Where, in your opinion, does blame lie for the violence in Ireland of the past ten years?

A. Had the British Government acceded to the demands of the Civil Rights Movement (1968) there would have been no violence.

—Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association Chairman, P. J. McClean, in Radio Eireann news interview (Irish language version) October 5th, 1978.

Q. Have the past ten years brought any changes in your attitude?

A. I am now ten years older and wiser. . . . I was very naive. I thought injustices existed because the British Government didn't know about it. I now know that the British Government planned and organised it that way.

—Bernadette McAliskey in R.E. news interview, October 5th, 1978.

"There never will be peace in the North as long as Britain buttresses unjust structures of power and economic opportunity there by her military presence and her subsidies. That must be part of the message of any Southern politician who speaks at an international gathering on the situation in the rest of Ireland. If he leaves that part out he contributes, indirectly at least,

to perpetuating the evil he professes to condemn. Mr. O'Kennedy's (Dublin Government Minister for Foreign Affairs) recent message to the U.N on hopeful signs in the North, followed by An Taoiseach's (Prime Minister Jack Lynch) prophecy that contact between North and South politicians in the EEC will bring North and South together, are certainly calculated to guarantee violence in the years ahead. The U.N. Assembly is only too happy to hear that the North is becoming less a trouble spot. That relieves them of the responsibility—never keenly felt—to do anything to see that elementary justice is introduced there. The Taoiseach's contribution is that we may now sit down and wait and see. Both men should of course tell the truth; but the whole truth, not the sporic part of it. Britain will do nothing significant except under pressure. Neither will any influential Power intervene except under pressure. The sad reality is that righting wrongs just because wrongs should be righted is not on the agenda of any Government. Mr. O'Kennedy and An Taoiseach ought to have learned that by now".

—Rev. Dr. Brian Kelly, in a letter to the Irish Times, October 7th, 1978.

"It is worth adding that in the years since 1970 when our basic demands were articulated in their present form, that time has vindicated them. Their essential validity has stood the test".

—Daithi O Conaill, Sinn Fein Vice-President, at Gaughan/Stagg Commemoration on April 16th, 1978.

Whether these statements from such differing sources reflect all the acquired wisdom of the past decade or the inherited wisdom of many past decades does not matter. What does matter is that they reflect the reality of the true source of political violence in Ireland and the growing recognition and acceptance of that reality. It is a reality that had to be learnt by a young generation, relearn't by an older generation and has yet to be faced by the self-deceivers and the self-defeatists among the Irish people. There is nothing sad about reality except the non-recognition of reality. To know what is on the agenda of government is necessary knowledge. To know what is not on the agenda of government is equally necessary knowledge—where a smokescreen of high moralistic attitudes and expressions of concern hides officially planned violence or a supine acceptance of its purveyance.

Those who refuse to recognise the reality will continue to occupy that grey area so fulsomely recommended to people in the schemes of politicians. The smudged grey area, comfortably neutralised, defused and nullified, where nothing is anything and everything has the same value—old bones from a distant past or the flesh and blood of the future, the grey occupants will dig for them or bury them with equal ease.

To acknowledge the reality of what is happening here in Ireland under British rule is to gain wider recognition and understanding of what is happening elsewhere. To see the arbitrary partition of our own country and the division of its people is to see the arbitrary divisions in other countries with the forceful exclusion or the forceful inclusion of national entities by lines drawn around oil-fields or areas of mineral wealth or areas of political or military strategic importance—all to suit the greed of powerful interests. To see the "rebellion" of "Ulster" Loyalists is to see the "rebellion" of "Rhodesian" Loyalists. British subsidies and supplies have been the lifeline of both. Britain is no more creditable as an upholder of peace in Ireland than as an upholder of sanctions in Africa. Does any greater credibility attach to those other "influential powers"?; those who loudly cherish the principles of justice? or those who lecture the Irish people on peace and reconciliation in pretended ignorance of the nature of our struggle? A recent publication, *Nuclear Axis*, based

on the documentary evidence of the Anti-Apartheid Movement, should sort out the purveyors of violence from the providers of Peace and Justice.

NUCLEAR AXIS

Nuclear Axis outlines evidence of secret deals between West Germany and South Africa and involving other countries—the U.S., Britain, France, as well as Brazil and Iran. The secret deals concern the acquisition of nuclear weapons. The documentary evidence, published by the Anti-Apartheid Movement, has not been refuted by any of the governments named. West Germany is prohibited by the Treaty of Brussels from building nuclear weapons on its own soil, but acquiring nuclear weapons has become big business. *Nuclear Axis* outlines the network which has been set up whereby every step in the nuclear fuel cycle can be acquired. The centre of the Axis is in Bonn where South African Ministers keep in close contact with business and military interests. The major project has been the building of a nuclear plant in South Africa with a plentiful supply of W. African uranium and European techniques. It is the only uncontrolled such plant in the world—totally free of international control, whereby South Africa is building up its own nuclear explosions and has become a major supplier of fissile material to other nuclear countries. It is aided and abetted in this conspiracy by Western Governments—the U.S. is involved in a double role, publicly criticizing South Africa, privately giving full technical assistance. Britain plays a major role. France provides delivery assistance as well as supplying Mirage bombers and other necessary hardware. Iran supplies oil. S.W.A.P.O. has already protested the drainage of uranium and depletion of other natural resources in Namibia by the South African authorities.

This week-end we see the Foreign Ministers of the U.S., Canada, Britain, France and West Germany, bleeding hearts stitched to their sleeves, setting out for Namibia to meet the South Africans in order "to try and break the deadlock on elections for the independence of Namibia". Back in their home countries their peoples are encouraged, at whatever cost, to maintain their solemn commitments not to engage in the fields of sport with South Africa—that would be to boost and give credibility to the White regime there and an outrageous subversion of the Cause of Human Rights and elementary justice for Black South Africa.

5. A BULLDOG WITH NO TEETH?

International political hypocrisy is so frequent and common-place that we have come to live with it. What is more difficult to understand is why we accept it so readily in situations where we know it to be present. After Watergate, everybody said they knew all along. Yet it took the brave, dangerous and frequently unpleasant digging of two junior members of the Fourth Estate to make rejection of the word of the President of the United States—fashionable. It should be added, of course, that there are few other countries in the world where press-freedom is so jealously protected that it was possible to do this. Even then it might not have happened were it not for the strong independent attitude of Editor Dan Bradley and his staff in the *Washington Post*.

Viewed from that angle, the latest revelations about Britain's handling of the oil situation in Rhodesia for well over a decade, are not all that shocking. Britain's record in international politics and diplomacy is (let us be kind!) "a matter of record". The only trouble is that so many people do not take that record into account when they enter into negotiations with

them. The sad sad story of Ireland since the 1921 settlement—So-called—could be studied with profit by everybody. Those who took opposing sides on that particular issue would probably agree with this much: beware of the bulldog, even when he has lost his teeth. Be doubly cautious when he smiles or tries to flatter or even appears to be generous.

The Rhodesia story however is somewhat different because it went on for so long and has brought such tragic consequences. It is rather unique in that Tory and Labour governments must share the disgrace (what disgrace?)—which in turn probably means that there will be a good attempt at a domestic political cover-up. Britain's honour now depends on the Liberals' tender mercies—and they have their own problems already! The brutal truth seems to be that in international power-games there are no moral guides, no right and wrong, true and false, no real or honest agreements—just "accommodations". What matters it the stakes, and the realistic state of play. In short, what you can get away with. We are not confining this observation to Britain or to any one situation. Pot calls the kettle black, or say its really white, or protests it cannot see the colours, all the time. The fact that you have a majority of shares held by a British "Socialist" (God save the mark!) Government in an oil company, or that you tell the U.N. that sanctions will work in months if not weeks and therefore military intervention is not necessary, or indeed that your supporters have a "don't buy oranges" or "don't play rugby campaign" going against the regimes to which you are allowing the much more vital oil supply, is neither here nor there. Indeed, by comparison some of the things the giant oil multi-nationals have been condemned for doing, pale into insignificance. At least they are honest about their profit interest, and "business is business" approach. We should also remember that not all oil companies were involved in this latest scandal. Those mainly involved were British firms—and ones with a government majority share-holding as well!

The most important lesson from the revelations must focus on attitudes to South Africa. British politicians have said enough on the topic over the years. So have others. Yet the reality seems to be that economic and trading interests ensure that Britain, and others in the western world, will do nothing on this issue, in pursuance of their stated public positions, as long as their own domestic economic, trading and other interests are endangered. In the South African case, when the bulldog had to bite, he was found to have no teeth. Neither has the bulldog's policies. The implications of this reality are rather frightening. But they will have to be faced squarely.

6. SINN FEIN FOREIGN AFFAIRS BUREAU

SOUTH AFRICA

While the liberation forces of South-West Africa Peoples Organisation, SWAPO, in Namibia and the Patriotic Front in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia), play an increasingly prominent role in their respective countries, the growing guerrilla activity in the heartland of racist supremacy—South Africa itself—is becoming a force to be reckoned with.

"Urban terrorism has come to stay for the foreseeable future", said former South African Prime Minister Vorster on a visit to a state police 'anti-terrorist' training centre last year.

Guerrilla activity involves attacks on white urban areas against property, action against black collaborators and informers, and rural infiltration by guerrillas. The first bombing campaign was in the early 1960's following the banning of the major black

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political organisations. A new phase began in December 1976 with several incidents in white urban areas, none involving loss of life. State Police Minister Jimmy Kruger publicly warned that "Large numbers of people" who had left the country for guerrilla training were now returning, and police were on a "round the clock" lookout for them.

In June last year two warehousemen were killed when three guerrillas carrying automatic weapons and grenades took refuge after being spotted in Johannesburg. Since then over twenty bombing incidents have been reported including one in the centre of Johannesburg. Petrol bombs and dynamite have been used. In July 1978 a black police detective was shot dead.

In April this year the "Security Police Chief" admitted there had been several bun battles between guerrillas of the African National Congress and police in a rural area near the Mozambique border. Shortly afterwards the establishment of a new army base in the region was announced.

The recent largescale intensification of guerrilla activity is closely linked with the victories of liberation forces in neighbouring Mozambique and Angola, and their imminent victory in Zimbabwe (Rhodesia). South African freedom fighters now have training and support nearer home. However, they avoid directly engaging South African forces to avoid reprisals against the states supporting them, and spread their activities over as wide an area as possible.

"It is an extended onslaught we are fighting", stated the Police Chief, who gave 2,200 as the number of 'potential terrorists' brought to court since June 1976 under 'security legislation'.

Meanwhile from January 1978 all white South African males over the age of 16 are required to register for two years military service followed by at least thirty days a year for the next eight years. The country is less attractive now to white immigrants who will now become liable for conscription after two years unless they wish to forfeit their residence and work rights. Industry is already worried about effects on apprenticeships and manpower, and committees have been established abroad to help young people who have left the country to avoid the 'draft' and the severe penalties for not serving. Ominously the stage is being set for Africa's 'Vietnam'.

7 SOLIDARITY MEETING IN BELGIUM

Sixty people met on Thursday, October 5th, in the Belgium capital of Brussels, to listen to the report of two Belgian lawyers, on the right of the Irish Republican Prisoners of War in H-Block and to discuss building support for the Irish resistance against British occupation. A report was also given by the Paris-based solidarity group *Irlande Libre*.

The meeting decided to send a message of solidarity to the Republican Movement and expressed their total support with the heroic struggle of the 350 protestors in the H-Blocks of Long Kesh and Armagh Jail.

Speakers stressed that they were determined to work in Belgium to break the wall of silence on this struggle.

It was decided to set up a support committee for the prisoners and for the Irish resistance struggle.

8 ARMAGH PRISON CHAPLAIN TELLS U.S. OF H-BLOCK

The Rev. Raymond Murray, chaplain at Armagh Prison, talked to a group of Congressmen at the Rayburn House Office Building, Capitol Hill, recently about prison conditions in Northern Ireland and what he had to say is unlikely to sit well with the British Embassy in Washington.

Fr. Murray said of the women prisoners in Armagh: "Both the 27 on protest for political status and the remand prisoners, have been suffering a regime of excessive lock-ups and defeminisation".

He asked the Congressmen to do something about "the deplorable conditions" in H-Block, Long Kesh. The inmates have refused to wear prison clothes or work "because they have been subjected to all these emergency laws and violations of emergency laws".

Fr. Murray was addressing the 100-strong Ad-Hoc Congressional Committee for Irish Affairs, an unofficial body headed by Congressman Mario Biaggi, the conservative Democrat from the Bronx. Biaggi plans to visit Ireland on November 11th. Congressmen Hamilton Fish and Joshua Eilberg reported on their recent visit to Ireland.

They are locked up 24 hours a day in their cells, denied association with fellow-prisoners and contact with the outside world through radio, television, papers, writing material, reading materials", Fr. Murray said of the men in H-Block.

He remarked that it might be difficult in a country like the U.S., which set so much store by human rights "in theory and practice" and which resolved the gravest problems "by legal and political means", to understand the situation in Northern Ireland.

For the last seven years some 5,000 men and women have been imprisoned in the North of Ireland. They come from poor areas, the majority of them are Catholics. They have lived in conditions of chronic unemployment—25% to 30% in some places. They have seen their fathers and brothers interned, their homes raided by British soldiers, their womenfolk insulted, holy pictures pulled from walls. They themselves have been searched while spread-eagled on the street.

Many of the imprisoned are 17, 18 and 19 years of age. They are serving long sentences handed down by "Diplock courts". The violations of human rights that put them in these prisons have been well catalogued. How wondered why the U.S. President and Congress think so little of the matter as not even to deplore it?

"It is my opinion that the Irish people are not sufficiently united in speaking out with one voice for human rights for Irish people and for other people", Fr. Murray said.

Since the troubles erupted in the North, Fr. Murray said that, with Fr. Denis Faul and Fr. Brian Brady, he had compiled numerous documents on the treatment accorded arrested persons and how those arresting them broke the law. No action was ever taken against the latter, he noted.

Apparently "the sweeping emergency powers" used by the British Government in Northern Ireland do not apply to policemen and soldiers. "No British soldier or policeman in Northern Ireland has served a single day in jail for shooting dead 60 innocent people, torturing 800 people, using inhuman and degrading treatment on arrested persons".

These people break the law every day and in many cases do so "with the full approval and with orders of their superiors up to the rank of Cabinet Minister—we know this was true in the case of the men who were hooded and suffered sensory deprivation in August 1971", he said.

Describing conditions in his own prison, Fr. Murray said 120 women political prisoners have been there at one time, 32 of them interned. There are still 70 women in Armagh undergoing long sentences.

"From December 1971 until August 1972 Armagh Prison was used for male prisoners on remand for political charges", the chaplain continued. "That was a turning point in my life because I saw with my own eyes the bruising, burning and after-effects of drugs and electricity used in torturing".

The treatment of people in prison he called "squalid, cowardly, bestial". Yet such conditions and methods persist despite

a European Commission on Human Rights decision, two Amnesty reports, documentaries by both the BBC and Independent Television, and catalogues of brutality and torture such as "The Castlereagh File", by Fr. Faul and himself.

What happens is that new techniques are developed, "mainly designed not to leave marks".

Fr. Murray listed seven "demands": the end of seven-day detention, imprisonment without trial, torture and degradation of prisoners, long remands, Diplock courts (which accept verbal statements on the word of policemen and pronounce sentences of "great disparity" that are also "inhuman"), the "deplorable conditions" in Northern Ireland prisons. He urged, too, a re-examination of all cases in Castlereagh, the rescinding of many sentences, and the release of 18 Irish prisoners in Britain.

The priest described H-Block as "this mile-square camp of concrete, iron, barbed wire, soldiers, dogs, hundreds of prison officers, men in cages". In 1976 the British Government decided "no-one would receive political status for political crimes committed after March 1976". The following September one prisoner, Ciaran Nugent, went "on the blanket". Others followed suit. Nugent's protest is now over two years old.

The British Government set out to smash the protest and "deliberately imposed excessive punishments". These included no physical exercise, no reading material, no writing material. After 17 months the authorities began to interfere with visits and correspondence and continued to beat up young prisoners. The men then refused to wash and stop out.

"They are seen by priests in their cells every week when they go round for confessions", said Fr. Murray. "The experience is a terrible one. The H-Block has an underground atmosphere, bare concrete bricks painted white, slashed with iron gates; the doors of the cells like great massive safes.

"On opening a terrible stench emerges. Two Rip Van Winkle types with emaciated white bodies and bedraggled hair and beards rise up from sponge mattresses that are half-soaked with urine, clutching at their blanket or blue towel to cover their nakedness. . . The once white walls of the tiny cell are now darkened with dried excrement. There is no furniture at all in the cells. You move from cell to cell and after a few hours you are glad to get away. You have taken the precaution of eating nothing. But these men are there all night, all day, all week, some of them for years".

These conditions, Fr. Murray charged, had been created by the British Administration for political purposes. This is not new in Irish history. The British use violations of basic human rights "to create conditions suitable for the imposition of a British solution on the Irish problem". He wondered if the millions of Irish in the U.S. were prepared to allow them to do it.

He concluded by saying he was leaving on one side leaders of violence who want exclusive control of prisoners and their relations for political reasons: and "certain Marxist elements who want to eliminate the decent middle-of-the-road Irish family men and women and leave only a rump of wild talkers". He said the Irish in Ireland, in Britain and in the U.S. should "come together as a united family demanding decent standards for all people and especially for prisoners and the poor".

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