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# THE NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION

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'HAD WE all known it, the unreported [by the London *Times*] Civil Rights march [at Dungannon] was to be the start of something which would shake Northern Ireland to its foundations, split the Unionist Party and initiate more reforms in two years than I thought possible in ten. Moreover, Westminster, our sovereign Parliament, had Northern Ireland thrust on its plate as never before since the Government of Ireland Act of 1920.' Terence O'Neill, *Autobiography*.

There can be no doubt that the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was one of the great movements which from time to time have materialised in Ireland, flowered, and by losing the balance of the many potent forces contained within them, died.

Eighty people attended a meeting in the International Hotel, Belfast on 29 January 1967. Five of our Campaign members were there, and I must confess I knew very few others present. They were obviously concerned people who had been doing some preparatory homework together, and meant business. We learnt afterwards that, six months beforehand, people like Messrs Cathal Goulding, Chief of Staff of the then united IRA and Roy Johnston had been working with others towards a civil rights movement. Johnston, we were told, was a Marxist theoretician.

The meeting proceeded in a businesslike way, and set to work organising a committee as follows: Noel Harris of the Draughtsmen's Union, DATA, was chairman. I was made vice-chairman. The committee appointed were Jack Bennett, Wolfe Tone Society, Robin Cole, chairman of the Young

Unionists, Paddy Devlin, NILP, Michael Dolley, ~~Communist Party~~, Fred Heatley, Wolfe Tone Society, Billy McMillan, Republican Clubs, John Quinn, Ulster Liberal Party, Joe Sherry, Republican Labour, Betty Sinclair, Communist Party. Derek Peters of the Communist Party was appointed secretary. Amongst those present were three members of the London National Council for Civil Liberties: Tony Smythe, Cedric Thornberry and J.C. Sheppard. We affiliated on that day to the NCCL. One of the people present at the meeting was Mr Nelson Elder, a Unionist senator.

At our first meeting a week later we specified our five rather vague aims, which in a way indicated that we were not very sure of where we were going. They were: (1) To defend the basic freedom of all citizens, (2) to protect the rights of the individual, (3) to highlight all possible abuses of power, (4) to demand guarantees for freedom of speech, assembly and association, (5) to inform the public of their lawful rights. We then went on to formulate a draft constitution which was accepted at a later meeting. It was emphasised again and again that there was to be no attempt to subvert the constitution of the State and that the organisation would not deal with the question of the partition of Ireland in any way.

It is interesting to note how long it took to really get our ideas into good order. For instance, when the executive met in Dungannon on 27 April 1969, we presented a much more potent and cohesive image. We set out our demands uncompromisingly. They were (1) One man one vote with each vote of equal value, (2) abolition of the Special Powers Act, (3) withdrawal of the Public Order (Amendment) Bill, (4) introduction of anti-discriminatory legislation, (5) introduction of a compulsory local authority housing points system, (6) disbandment of the B-Specials, (7) disarming of the RUC and (8) a public enquiry into police activities in Derry.

Would it not have been a wonderful world if the authorities had said, 'These are sensible people, these are reasonable requests, let us grant them without delay.' That would have been the end of the civil rights movement and of the killing. Our little province could possibly have moved on into a joyous future. As things turned out, most of the demands were eventually, grudgingly conceded, but in a welter of blood and disorder.

But before that meeting in 1967 we had lost one member of our committee, whom I at least valued, Robin Cole the Unionist. I suppose it was not unexpected that he should go. Once the Unionist Party realised that NICRA was a force to be reckoned with they presumably pulled him out. He gave as his reason for leaving the speech by our first secretary, Derek Peters, at the Annual Meeting in February 1968. Mr Cole accused Derek of a 'lack of objectivity' because he compared 'the fascist South African Government' with the Northern Ireland Government over the Special Powers Act. 'Mr Peters is not prepared to be objective, and I regard this as a deplorable return to a sophisticated form of "gable wall" politics. Personally I would like to see an end to the Special Powers Act, and I feel the Minister of Home Affairs must establish that a crisis situation exists to justify its retention', he said.

From then onwards meetings of the executive occurred at regular intervals. There was a good deal of talk, but little action. There had been eighteen months of rather unrewarding leaflet campaigns and meetings in church halls.

A head of steam was, however, gradually building up all over Northern Ireland. People were aware that the British Government seemed much more concerned about the plight of the majority black population in Rhodesia than about conditions here, and that in spite of great efforts by Paul Rose and Gerry Fitt on our behalf.

At a press conference on 6 June 1968 Lord Stonham, Minister of State at the Home Office, had indicated that nothing would be done by the Government to interfere in the matter of discrimination, plural voting or gerrymander. He said that he 'had no instructions from Mr. Wilson to tell Mr. O'Neill to move faster or further on reforms'.

In Dungannon as elsewhere, the local Urban and Rural Councils continued their intransigence, so much so that Austin Currie felt obliged to draw national attention to our problems when he took possession of an unjustly allocated Council house in Caledon. Soon afterwards he requested to be present with two colleagues at a meeting of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights executive. This was held in late July. To facilitate country members it was held at the house of Kevin Agnew in Maghera. Austin's proposition, put forward by

Michael McLaughlin and John Donaghy, was for a civil rights march.

This new chapter in minority affairs produced a lengthy and serious discussion, chaired by Betty Sinclair. The outcome of this meeting was a press release in which we stated that a new approach to our problems was overdue, that blunt denials were no longer acceptable and that Unionist monopoly of power must be reduced. The executive went on to say that 'a demonstration would take place in an area in which discrimination was clearly evident. This will take the form of a protest march from Coalisland to Dungannon on Saturday August 24th'.

In her book, *The Price of my Soul*, Bernadette Devlin took a much more flippant approach than most of the rest of us. She talked of people in Coalisland 'generally behaving as if they were at a carnival'. In my view most were serious, perhaps a little apprehensive. She talked of 'marchers dropping off at every pub on the way'. But there was only one small public house on the route, and the march proceeded at a spanking pace on its five-mile route. The marchers, about two and a half or three thousand in number, were banned from entering the centre of Dungannon, called Market Square, and we were ordered to skirt the town by Quarry Lane and enter the Catholic area about a mile and a half farther on. It was only when we arrived in Coalisland to start the march that we were made aware of this ban. When we arrived at the outskirts of Dungannon there were about 400 police with tracker dogs barring the way. A rope was also slung between three police tenders near the gates of the local hospital. When the procession reached this police blockade, microphones were erected on a lorry and the marchers sat down on the road. Behind the police barricade about 500 Unionist Party supporters had gathered. Many carried clubs and staves but the police in the area did nothing but exchange greetings with them. Amongst them were prominent Unionist councillors, shouting slogans and singing party songs. The NICRA supporters were addressed by Betty Sinclair, Gerry Fitt, Austin Currie, Erskine Holmes and Jack Hassard. Betty was placatory and reasonable, yet at the same time she inspired us. The men were more militant. As Austin Currie, from the platform of the lorry, looked across the police barricades he

compared his position with that of President Kennedy surveying the Berlin Wall. 'Only for the women and children present' Gerry Fitt said 'I would lead the people to the centre of the town'. Jack Hassard explained that the opposition councillors had done all they could through progressive means to obtain a fair method of housing allocation but their claims had fallen on deaf ears.

There were minor attempts to break through the barricade but they were beaten back by police using truncheons. The meeting ended with the singing of the American civil rights anthem 'We shall overcome', and the crowd was advised to disperse quietly. After this a large number of leaders, some of whom we did not even know, adjourned to our house, a couple of hundred yards away, for tea and sandwiches. Later that night a section of the crowd made a detour to Market Square and attempted to 'sit down'. They were batoned by the police.

Erskine Holmes, a member of both the executive of the Northern Ireland Labour Party and that of NICRA, and a speaker at the demonstration, issued a statement condemning the action of the Minister of Home Affairs, Mr William Craig, and the RUC, in preventing a peaceful and non-sectarian demonstration from entering Dungannon.

There was another statement issued by the secretary of the Young Socialists in Belfast, Mr David A. Graham. It condemned the RUC for not allowing the parade to reach the Market Square. It also condemned all those who spoke at the meeting who, without exception, accepted the police decision instead of continuing with the march.

There has been much play made by Unionists of the fact that there were republicans in our civil rights march. Of course there were, they are a segment of Irish life, and probably always will be. They were not there as an organised group, they carried no placards and were not recognisable since they were anonymous marchers. What would the Unionists expect the executive to do about them? The same question would apply to Tomas MacGiolla who was also on the march to Dungannon.

Whether they were republicans or Republicans I do not know, but there were many young brawny men keeping order and restraining militants, among whom were the Young

Socialist Alliance, forever trying to break down barriers and whom many of us regarded as noisy, combative pests.

The Campaign for Social Justice, trying desperately to promote reasonableness in a deteriorating situation, fraught with danger, wrote to Mr Harold Wilson thus:

Dear Prime Minister,

I want to add my views to those of Mr Gerry Fitt, MP, who has already seen you about the Civil Rights march in Dungannon.

(1) Although notification to the police was given a month previously, the proposed route was banned at midnight on the day before the march. Responsibility for the ban was taken by the Minister of Home Affairs. Are we not entitled to claim that this prohibition, coming when it did, was calculated to inflame the passions of the marchers?

(2) The alternative route would have added almost a mile and a half to our march, which after five miles already uphill, would have been impossible for many of us.

(3) Some time after the meeting ended, young people who 'sat down' in the town square were batoned by the police as they sat, whilst shrieking Unionist demonstrators were not even approached!

I can tell you that I found the spectacle of the armed and furious police, with their dogs, most terrifying.

Mr Jack Hassard, the local N.I. Labour leader, has had his life threatened more than once since Saturday.

I am sending you copies of both the Unionist and anti-Unionist local papers, so that you can judge for yourself between them. I only make one point; Mr. Austin Currie MP, did not at any time use bad language as has been alleged.

Our next march will be in Londonderry. I trust you will not think it an impertinence on my part if I suggest to you that the taxpayers in Britain, as well as those here, are paying for a disproportionately large police force, great number of 'B' specials, and even contingents of the British army here in Northern Ireland.

I suggest that the time has come for any political group

to be allowed to demonstrate peaceably anywhere in Northern Ireland.

If the Unionists were to see, even once, that you were deploying your police force and your army to protect the minority here, they would shrink from this kind of publicity from then onwards.

Please let me know that our good Civil Rights people will be safe when they march in Derry.

Yours sincerely,

M.P. McCluskey

for The Campaign for Social Justice.

At this time there were two very active organisations in the city of Derry. One was the Derry Citizens Action Committee, whose members included John Hume and Ivan Cooper. The other was the Derry Housing Action Committee, dominated by Eamonn McCann and Eamonn Melaugh. These last were younger, much more militant and thrusting, and had been organising sit-downs and protest meetings. I attended a get-together in Derry at which members of both associations were present, and it took little perception to see that there was no love lost between them. Members of the Housing Action Committee were closer to the executive of the Civil Rights Association. Thus it was no surprise to us in the governing body of NICRA when we were approached by them in September 1968 about a march in Derry.

The executive of the CRA held a properly constituted meeting. Betty Sinclair was in the chair. We were told that Mr William Craig, the Minister of Home Affairs, had placed a ban on marching within Derry's walls. A majority decision was taken not to attempt to break the police barricades in Derry on 5 October—the day when the Derry people, mainly the Housing Action Committee, had decided to hold the march. The plan was to withdraw from the barricade if we were stopped, and hold a meeting, as we had done so successfully in Dungannon a month before.

Frank Gogarty, Fred Heatley and I were delegated to go to Derry on 4 October to inform them there of our decision. We were meeting the Derry Civil Rights Association, which, I got the impression, was little more than the Housing Action

Committee wearing other hats. (It is noteworthy that John Hume never joined the Derry CRA)

The meeting was tempestuous and attended only by very militant people who overwhelmed our efforts, and in the end we agreed to support the Derry Civil Rights Association and break the police ban. Although I did not attend the march on 5 October because of the way the Derry people had rejected the Civil Rights Association decision, I now have to admit that the militants could claim a success, since at that time every Westminster politician had been carefully briefed again and again by our Campaign for Social Justice as to the true situation in Ulster, and were showing every sign of doing nothing about it. It seemed therefore to have required a brutal orgy to secure world attention which might lead to reforms. It began to dawn on me that, if the Northern Ireland Catholics had been waiting for our reasoned arguments and carefully collected statistics to influence events, they might have waited for a further fifty years.

Mr Craig's ban on the march changed the whole situation because it brought into the civil rights movement opposition Stormont MPs, Queen's University students and a large number of Catholics who up till then had been tepid about civil rights.

Gerry Fitt had persuaded three Westminster Labour MPs—Russell Kerr, Mrs Anne Kerr and John Ryan—to attend as observers. The world press and television was there in force. John Hume, Ivan Cooper, Eddie McAteer, Kevin Agnew, Gerry Fitt and Paddy Devlin positioned themselves in the front row as they made ready to start the march from the Waterside Station. Their intention was to make their way to the Diamond where an open air meeting was to be held. The crowd was warned by District Inspector Meharg about what would happen if the ban was breached.

All started forward singing their way up Duke Street where they were stopped by the police, who promptly attacked, clubbing Fitt and McAteer who were incapacitated. Betty Sinclair at this stage climbed on to a chair and tried to cool tempers. It looked then as if the marchers would abandon their aim of proceeding. The police again attacked with batons and watercannon. The marchers retreated but were set



upon at the other end of Duke Street by another police contingent. There was mayhem as the crowd tried to escape. The police must not have realised, or perhaps did not care, that practically the whole world was looking on as the watercannon hosed women and even babies indiscriminately. Some of the marchers were trampled underfoot, and some beaten as they lay on the ground. The MP John Ryan was aghast. He particularly spoke of one woman over sixty who first had her glasses removed by one policeman and was then batoned by another. This lady was not even taking part in the demonstration.

The copy that every newsman present in Derry on that day sent to his paper contained a series of anecdotes telling of the unbelievable ferocity and stupidity of the RUC. Fergus Pyle of the *Irish Times* headed his piece, 'An old city faces a new sorrow' and that about summed it all up.

Even today, as an introduction to many documentaries about Northern Ireland, we are treated to flashbacks of policemen scrambling over bodies, truncheons flailing, as they dispersed the Derry demonstrators.

As in Dungannon the month before, it was inevitable that some hotheads would seek revenge, which indeed they did. They set to on the Protestant Commemorative Monuments in Butcher Street, then on into the Protestant ghetto off the Diamond where, armed with bottles and stones, they attacked anyone they saw. The inhabitants responded and another sectarian upheaval had begun. Later the riot squad followed the crowds back to the Bogside, where the first barricades to prevent police entry were being erected.

Ulster was now in a bigger mess than ever.

By now most provincial towns which had a sizeable Catholic minority were organising a local civil rights group. Later in October of that year Strabane Civil Rights Association was formed. On 27 October twelve of its members set out on a fourteen-mile march from Strabane to Derry to show their solidarity with the Derry Civil Rights Association. They only got half way when they were attacked and beaten up by a crowd at Maghermason in Co. Tyrone. The placards they were carrying were seized and torn up, and poles used to beat the marchers, augmenting the sticks which their assailants already possessed. Some marchers were thrown to the ground,

and an attempt was made to knife one person. Earlier, as they passed Bready, they were stoned and opponents yelled at them 'Up Paisley' and 'Up Craig'. Eventually they reached Derry Guildhall where their Chairman, Laurence O'Kane, attempted to present a letter to the Unionist Mayor of Derry. This gentleman was nowhere to be found in spite of a previous letter to him telling of the group's intended arrival. The marchers were received by Ivan Cooper, representing the Derry Citizens Action Committee.

On their way the police shadowed the marchers but made no attempt to protect them.

As the minority community gradually pushed for its place in the sun, the Protestants were finding it very difficult to adjust to the changing situation. The television was opening up to what in Britain had long been standard practice. Civil rights leaders had to battle their way forward in the changing environment. This was the kind of thing that happened:

In mid-October there was a current affairs programme screened on Independent Television from the Belfast studio at Havelock House. Taking part were John Hume, Ivan Cooper, Eamonn Melaugh, Finbarr O'Doherty (Derry), Rory McShane (Newry), and Patricia, as well as some people not involved in civil rights, to provide a contrary view. A crowd of Paisleyite extremists, some 200-300 strong, laid siege to Havelock House. As he left, Austin Currie was kicked and punched and treated to a flood of obscenities, as indeed was anyone else that the crowd recognised. Gerry Fitt had to wait for more than an hour before he could be smuggled out of the building via the back door by two Special Branch men.

The Armagh committee for Civil Rights—like Strabane, only recently formed, but with a solid middle-of-the-road membership—wanted to show their new organisation's capacity and passed on a request to us at the centre for support of a march on 30 November. This was readily given.

By now Rev. Ian Paisley had decided to take a hand in affairs. He issued a call for 'every Loyalist in Ulster to assemble in Armagh on Saturday to take control of the city' so as to prevent civil rights demonstrators from marching. Describing the civil rights movement as 'a front for the IRA', Rev. Paisley alleged that arrangements had already been made for many 'hooligans' to cross the border to take part in

what was hoped would be a full-scale civil riot. 'We intend to take over the city and be in control of it. They are not going to move around here the way they did in Londonderry.' He and the local hardliner, Douglas Hutchinson, made 'an aggressive and threatening' [Cameron report] approach to the RUC demanding that the march be banned. A tatty handbill was circulated in the town saying 'Board up your windows. Remove all women and children from the city on Saturday 30th November.' Posters were everywhere, they read 'For God and Ulster SOS to all Protestant Religions. Don't let the Republican IRA and CRA make Armagh another Londonderry. Assembly in Armagh on Saturday 30th November. Issued by the UCDC' [Ulster Constitution Defence Committee]. Rev. Paisley's lieutenant, Major Ronald Bunting, made strenuous attempts to mount a counter demonstration so that both it and the Civil Rights Association march would be banned, but without success. [It was notable that the police in Armagh were trying harder than heretofore to be fair. They removed many of the UCDC posters].

At 1.00 a.m. on the morning of the march thirty cars drove into the centre of Armagh and parked. Rev. Paisley, Bunting and about a hundred supporters stayed in their cars till morning, when they proposed to hold a 'religious service'. The police had roadblocks in place around the city. Protestant weapons removed from cars that morning included two revolvers and over one hundred other weapons, including bill-hooks, scythes and other sharpened metal objects. In spite of police precautions, crowds of Paisleyites could be seen in the city carrying staves and clubs. Rev. Paisley carried a black-thorn stick and Bunting a walking stick.

Thomas Street, part of the march route, was blocked by a truck. Paisleyites sang hymns continuously. By now Market Street, on the Civil Rights Association route, was crowded with Protestants. The police, knowing that they would be unable to clear a way, erected barricades to keep the two sides apart. We marchers, numbering about five thousand, were compelled to hold our meeting at the police blockade. Only by good stewarding the same troublemakers as at Derry, namely the Young Socialists, were prevented from breaking through to the Paisleyites.

When the main demonstration had broken up and most

CRA members and supporters had dispersed, a clash occurred in Catholic Cathedral Road between young civil rights supporters and Paisleyites. The police made baton charges. A disturbance broke out when a group of Paisleyites carrying a Union Jack and pickaxe handles were returning to their buses. An armoured car, fitted with a watercannon and steel helmeted police carrying riot shields, went into action. Some people required hospital treatment as a result of these activities.

A BBC Panorama team was later attacked and television crews generally were reviled. At the close of the day Rev. Paisley and his supporters staged a triumphal march over part of the area denied to us, singing their sectarian songs and shouting abuse at policemen.

Understandably we of the executive were angry that once again our properly notified march had been aborted. The Campaign, in order to keep Westminster fully informed, again wrote to Mr Wilson thus:

Dear Prime Minister,

I am sending you a report of a speech made by Mr William Craig which, some people say, was an important reason for the Rev. Ian Paisley and his followers deciding to take the law into their own hands and to occupy the centre of Armagh last Saturday.

On that day the Civil Rights Association was to march through the city along a route previously agreed with the police. Later the County Inspector announced that he had not received enough reinforcements to carry out his task. This is inexcusable since Paisley supporters were in Armagh since 2.00 a.m. the morning of the march, and because there are 3,000 regular police in Northern Ireland, as well as innumerable Specials.

Mr Craig's speech was provocative and sectarian. Indeed, I am sure you will read into it some contempt for both the Westminster and his own Government, and especially for the 'reforms' which have been suggested for Northern Ireland. On the platform was also the deputy Prime Minister.

Our point by point commentary on these 'reforms' has already been sent to you. It has been widely approved of.

The 'reforms' are totally inadequate, and satisfy very few here except *all* the members of the Unionist party. This itself condemns them.

Some members of the subordinate Parliament here seem determined to precipitate a civil war. Mr Craig has been working hard to involve our fine Civil Rights organisation, which is made up of people of all beliefs, in a sectarian struggle (a policy which has worked well for fifty years). Already the activities of Unionists have damaged the good name of Britain.

The kind of unpleasantness your Government is allowing us to endure here at a local level does it little credit.

For example, the young wife of Austin Currie, MP, has had several dreadful nights, with thugs screaming epithets outside her house in the country, at a time when her husband was absent on political business. This lady, who only recently has had a baby, comes from a respectable home, and is unused to such treatment.

I am heartily sick of the evil anonymous letters I receive, and the many death threats against my husband and myself, as I am of the intimidation that decent Protestants are suffering to prevent them speaking out for justice.

We have no law preventing intimidation or incitement, because, let us face it, many Unionists regard both as political weapons.

When you read about Armagh and become aware that British, Irish and even Swiss camera teams were afraid to film the Rev. Paisley's mob, you must see the resemblance to the beginning of Hitler's political movement.

On Saturday 23 November last, the young students of Queen's University came to Dungannon to hold a meeting in order to form a local branch of their People's Democracy.

Thugs, some of whom I am reliably informed were armed, broke it up, and later laid siege to the Post Office, where one of the finest members of your own party in Northern Ireland, and also a Protestant, Jack Hassard, is employed. The police gave little help, and the meeting had to be abandoned. Photographers and journalists were assaulted and cameras broken. The mob subsequently

attacked the restaurant where the meeting had adjourned to, assaulting the owner and his pregnant wife.

Last Saturday 30 November on their way to the Civil Rights demonstration in Armagh, a group of courageous people again held an unannounced, surprise half-hour meeting in Dungannon. As the meeting ended, Paisleyites from the town rushed forward to break it up—again, not in Nazi Germany, but in Northern Ireland, British Labour controlled! I know you will understand that it is not presumption on my part when I make suggestions about what could be done to help us here. Surely I would propose what I thought was least likely to cause local disorder or harm the Socialist cause anywhere.

(i) Some liberal Protestants have suggested, as I previously have done to you, that the British Army would need to carry out police work here. Mr Craig is engaged at present in calling up his sectarian and excessively bigoted 'B' Specials. He intends to rule by fear, and to stimulate the IRA who have been restrained for longer even than we had hoped.

(ii) Some senior police officers here should be English, to counteract the *gaulieter* mentality of so many of the Royal Ulster Constabulary.

(iii) Finally, and most important of all, Mr Faulkner has worked very hard indeed to find new industry for the province. Almost all of this he has placed in Unionist areas, and, to be sure, the main jobs were given to Protestants. He and his friends would not easily let this go or allow Ulster's prosperity to diminish—therefore the safest and most potent pressure weapon you have is the fiscal.

We are all hoping you will use it in time.

Yours sincerely,

M.P. McCluskey

for The Campaign for Social Justice

Even though we had not yet achieved a planned march to its destination, 1968 ended with some encouragement that our publicity efforts, with the help of the media, were beginning to bear fruit on the British mainland.

At its Annual Conference in Margate, 1968, the National

Union of Students passed a motion supporting the civil rights movement. This body, the membership of which at that time was close on four hundred thousand, emphasised that the struggle should be pursued through non-violent means. This was something with which most of us were in agreement. We had realised that our success was greatest when violence was being directed against us—that was when the sympathy built up. Unarmed marchers with placards being assaulted by screaming men or even women, attacking from the sidelines, drew support for us. People sitting quietly in their armchairs watching the television screen and seeing the expressions on the various faces had no difficulty in making a judgment in our favour. The Students' report on the Special Powers Act was prepared by the NUS executive and was one of the items discussed at their conference.

The Ulster Constitution Reform Committee meeting in Cheshire in November stated that its aim was to 'uncover the Ulster pit and offend the British public with its stench'. The Committee added that 'Dr Paisley and his colleagues are fanning the flames of religious hatred to gain political power for themselves.'

Meanwhile the Prime Minister received a telegram from the secretary of the East Scotland Irish Association calling on him to take control in Northern Ireland.

Glasgow Campaign for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland was given a true picture of life in the North by Betty Sinclair, who addressed a meeting on our behalf.

Twelve members of the staff of Sunderland Technical College sent us a telegram congratulating us on what we had already achieved, and promising us support in the future. The signatures on this telegram made it very clear that they were English men and women and not Irish exiles. And we had word too of a proposed social justice march in Birmingham starting from the Church of England Cathedral with the Vicar, Rev. A. Howell, among the marchers.

It was only in December that Dungannon civil rights activists found time to organise a local Committee for the town. It turned out to be a stirring, exciting and at the same time frightening night.

There were about 800 of us gathered in St Patrick's Hall. Outside were about 400 Paisleyites, with steel-helmeted police

between them and the hall. A barrage of missiles flew between the opposing factions. What annoyed me then and has always been a source of resentment in this kind of confrontation, was the fact that the police faced the Catholics, with their backs to the Protestants.

The meeting began without two of the speakers, John Hume and Austin Currie who were delayed by a court hearing in Derry. When they did arrive they were given a five-minute standing ovation—the first time I had ever seen anything like this in Northern Ireland.

For a fuller description of events I could not do better than reproduce the letter the Campaign sent to the Home Secretary of the day. There is a possibility that he may have read it himself because when he visited Dungannon on behalf of the Labour Party in 1970 he complimented us on the high standard and amount of the publicity he had received from us (the Labour Party was out of office at the time—he could, I suppose, afford to be frank!).

7 December 1968

Dear Mr Callaghan,

On Wednesday last, 4 December, I was asked to be one of a platform party at a meeting in Dungannon to elect a local Civil Rights Committee. We were aware that the Paisleyites had been out in force the evening before, as they thought that was the date of our meeting.

I was unhappy all day because after the dreadful happenings in Armagh, I feared there would be trouble.

The organisers requested the police for protection. The meeting was a huge success, everyone was moderate in their pronouncements, my husband and I were warmly applauded when we stated that we accepted the Constitution of Northern Ireland, and that we would regard it as a social injustice to attempt to alter it without the approval of the majority of the people.

The meeting was covered from beginning to end by a BBC team headed by Martin Bell, as well as by other television and press reporters. During the meeting a large crowd of Paisleyites had assembled. I have been informed that the police made no attempt to disperse this menacing crowd.



When we left the hall we had to run the gauntlet of this mob and were protected mainly by our own stewards.

In the interests of all of the truth, I must inform you that before our stewards could control them, a few youths threw stones back at the Paisleyites—this, I suppose is human nature.

A reporter was shot at, his camera being damaged.

Martin Bell informed us afterwards on BBC 2 that he also was attacked.

I must further inform you that many have complained to me that the police on duty that night exchanged jokes with the Paisleyites.

My Protestant Labour councillor colleague, Jack Hassard, a World War 2 veteran, who topped the poll in our 'Catholic' ward, had his car smashed by an axe that night. His life and that of his wife and family has been threatened so many times that he has just announced his resignation from politics.

My own life has been threatened many times also.

How long must all this go on? How long must we suffer this intimidation, when all we are doing is asking for the rights which, said the Prime Minister in 1964, we were entitled to?

Meantime, Mr Craig is making provocative speeches in Belfast, Clogher, County Tyrone, and the night before last in Dungannon.

He is trying hard to whip up a sectarian conflict. This is not what the people of Civil Rights want, and I know all the leaders intimately.

As you are aware, Mr Paisley claimed on Tuesday last that these dreaded 'B Specials', all extreme Protestants, were largely his followers.

Please send me some reassurance at least.

Yours sincerely,

M.P. McCluskey

for The Campaign for Social Justice.

There is no joy in telling of NICRA's next endeavour, the Newry civil rights march on 11 January 1969. It ended in disorder and arson.

When the march was announced, Mr Paisley's lieutenant,

Major Ronald Bunting, intervened by threatening a counter demonstration. The police promptly re-routed the march. Immediately the temperature began to rise. Since Newry is a largely Catholic town, the local bishop Dr Eugene O'Doherty expressed the view that the original route had the approval of all sections of the people of Newry.

On the day of the march, when the participants arrived at the first crash barriers at the corner of Monaghan Street and Merchants Quay, the civil rights leaders sought to retain control by addressing them through a loud hailer. One of those appealing for non-violence was Michael Farrell of the People's Democracy. Tom Keane, Chairman of the local People's Democracy formally demanded of District Inspector Edgar that the marchers use the planned route. This was refused.

The crowd surged forward. A police tender was set on fire. Other tenders had their windows smashed as the mob crowded round them. The organisers made a further attempt to get the crowd to disperse without success.

At Merchants Quay another tender was set alight. The police allowed it to burn without attempting to intervene. Stewards grappled with marchers, trying to prevent them entering tenders to drive them away. Two hours after the first attack on the barriers, the police had not intervened. A watercannon held in reserve on Merchants Quay had not been brought into action. In all, five police tenders were burned. Another which would not burn was pushed into Newry Canal. Some students sat on the tenders to try and prevent them being driven off and burned, but were overwhelmed. A Queen's University student, William Bennett, writing to the press afterwards, told how he had remonstrated with a ringleader of the 'bully boys' not to set the police tenders on fire, with the argument that as a citizen of Newry and a ratepayer he had paid for these tenders. To this the other retorted that he was not a Newry citizen.

By this stage the police were being showered with missiles. The civil rights organisers dropped a plan to seal off the town by means of sit-downs on the main roads and instead attempted to take over some of the public buildings, including the Post Office and the Labour Exchange.

The next morning the *Sunday News* carried a large picture of

civil rights leaders, with arms locked, trying to hold back the mobs. They included three of the greatest friends of true civil rights in Dungannon, Paddy Fox, Michael McLaughlin and John Donaghy, their expressions all showing ineffable sadness.

Later on the night of the Newry debacle, Gerry Fitt laid his finger firmly on the nub of the matter, when in a statement he said, 'The Government was well aware that the eyes of the world, through press and television, were focused on these incidents, and the police, far from taking any action to prevent what happened, appeared to condone the burning of their vehicles. But the Government did not succeed in their objectives of smearing the Civil Rights movement. In fact not a single Protestant resident or business premises was interfered with or damaged,'—'It was significant', he commented, 'that no arrests were made at Burntollet but over twenty-three were arrested in Newry.'

The Inspector General of the RUC, Mr Anthony Peacock, said on 5 February 1969, that the police had 'evidence of IRA support for the civil rights movement. I do not think they are organising it, but it fits in with their long term plans for uniting Ireland forcibly. We know that at least two of them, including the president of Sinn Fein, have attended civil rights meetings in Belfast,'—'The police were satisfied that there was no armed Protestant organisation....' Harry Diamond, MP, declared that the Inspector General's statement 'could be seen as a scandalous party political intervention by a public official'.

There was great encouragement for us when, on 28 January 1969, the Presbyterian Church of Ireland issued a statement thus:

Whatever the faults of demonstrators, a far greater disservice has been done to Northern Ireland by those who have banded themselves together to prevent, by physical resistance, the peaceful expression of opinion, instead of answering it with greater reason and self discipline. By violence of speech and action, by personal vilification and harassment, they have dishonoured the cause they professed to defend. By mob action they have seriously compromised not only the principles of law and order but

also those whose difficult task it is to uphold law and order without fear or favour—both Government and police.

Such treatment of those who were protesting against what they believed to be wrong has been a grievous betrayal of the Protestant and Presbyterian principles of civil and religious liberty, and respect for conscience. We believe that many still do not realise the irreparable damage which has been done to the witness of the Gospel and to the Protestant and Presbyterian name both in Ireland and overseas. Avowed enemies of christianity could not have done more damage to the faith than things which have been said and done under the banner of religion.

The statement went on to declare that 'It was an unhealthy thing for any political force or party to restrict its membership, in theory or in practice, to any one church or group of denominations,' ... 'It is an unhappy legacy of our history that the Roman Catholic section of the community is disproportionately represented among the socially and economically depressed.' There was more in this vein, all very humane and reasonable.

In February 1969 Frank Gogarty was voted into the chair of the central executive of NICRA. The next big set piece demonstration was at Omagh on 12 April. Patrick Fahy, chairman of the local Civil Rights Association, secured our blessing for the protest and having informed the police in the required manner the local group set off. Despite the presence of 400 police, Paisleyite militants succeeded in having the march re-routed. At one stage the rival groups were within eighty yards of each other, and a policeman and a civilian were injured when a scuffle broke out between police and counter demonstrators. Two lines of police had earlier separated the 1,500-strong marchers and a few hundred Paisleyites in the town's Market Square.

Long before the marchers gathered at their starting-point the counter demonstrators had taken up positions on a narrow part of Market Street, many of them waving Union Jacks and some wearing Orange Order sashes.

When the marchers reached Dublin road corner they found their way blocked. They sat down on the road while officials of

the Committee walked forward to talk to District Inspector Dandale, who told them it was obvious that the march could not go through.

There and then the speeches were made. Patrick Fahy began by assuring those on the other side of the barrier that those he represented did not aim to replace one system of discrimination by another, the rights of all would be secure. Eamonn McCann said that they must make demands for those things that would serve the interests of the working classes. He appealed to disillusioned Protestants for support. Austin Currie suggested that the opposition were using the Union Jack as a cheap political rag. He reminded his listeners that notice of the march had been given, no re-routing had been ordered, yet their march had been stopped. Claude Wilton, chairman of the Derry Citizens Action Committee, said that he was an ordinary Protestant who had rebelled. It was their common battle to seek equal rights and opportunities for all. Michael Farrell, the People's Democracy leader, said that Captain O'Neill's mask as a liberal had slipped. Ivan Cooper, Frank Gogarty, Phelim O'Neill and Patsy McDonald added their weight to the appeal for equality by also speaking.

After listening to the speeches for an hour and a half the crowd by-passed the counter demonstration and made its way to the Courthouse. As they marched into Drumreagh Avenue the counter demonstrators pushed forward but were held back by a cordon of police, in front of which stood the march stewards. The counter demonstrators then rushed back up Market Street, in an effort to meet their opponents at the junction of Bridge Street and High Street, but they were again held back by a line of police.

There was a tense moment as a struggle broke out between the counter demonstrators and the police but the line of crash barriers held firm. As the civil rights crowd sat down on the Courthouse Hill a small group of Loyalists tried to outflank the police but were halted. On the roof of the Courthouse three groups of people were flying Union Jacks. Shortly afterwards both the civil rights protestors and the counter demonstrators dispersed quietly.

Of course many more civil rights marches were held, but nothing like the number of Protestant parades. To refer back;

the Minister of Home Affairs at the Stormont parliament, in answer to a question from John Hume, reported that more than 1,300 parades, marches or processions were held in 1968 by the Orange Order, the Apprentice Boys and the Royal Black Preceptory. This at a time when there had been less than a dozen civil rights marches, mostly in predominantly Catholic areas, and every one of these begrudged by the Protestant community.

By this stage there was a local Civil Rights Association in most towns. As a group they tackled local abuses as they occurred. The Magherafelt CRA pinpointed how the local Rural District Council abused housing allocation procedure. The Dungannon Group dealt with employment discrimination in the South Tyrone Hospital. The Maghera Association produced statistics to expose the misdeeds of the local Rural Council, the Mid-Ulster Hospital and the Telephone Exchange. Lurgan Civil Rights Committee held a 'teach-in' at which young Protestants were praised for their support. The fact that Protestants suffered discrimination, also, was stressed.

With so many disparate elements in NICRA it was inevitable that a smooth progress would not occur. The first 'split' was announced by the press on 15 March 1969. John MacAnerney, secretary, Fred Heatley, treasurer, Betty Sinclair, a past chairman, as well as a fourth executive member, Dr Raymond Shearer, resigned. The dispute came about because the People's Democracy, on the initiative of Michael Farrell and without previously consulting the executive, arranged a march through Protestant east Belfast to Stormont and indicated that they expected the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association to take part.

John MacAnerney described the march as lunacy. 'This route is notorious for the number of people who have been done to death in the past forty years. I strongly suspect that those who proposed this march have no intention of really walking along this route. One of them said to me: after all, we can rely on it being banned.'

The four who withdrew also stated that the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association was 'being infiltrated by a political party, forcing it into decisions which are preventing the aims for which the Association was founded'. Dr

Raymond Shearer, in a personal statement, pointed out that the march was to be conducted on People's Democracy lines only, that to attempt to traverse 'eight miles of solidly hostile streets was folly'. He went on to say that the PD representative on the Council denied that they were a political party (they had just fielded eight candidates in the Stormont election of February 1969). However, Kevin Boyle admitted to Raymond Shearer that they were indeed a political party, and that they hoped eventually to be the effective opposition at Stormont. Dr Shearer's fear was that the People's Democracy was trying to take over NICRA.

'A vote was taken concerning participation in the march, the result, "seven for", "seven against". The chairman, Frank Gogarty, gave his casting vote for participation,' Dr Raymond Shearer concluded.

On 22 March a conference was called to deal with the impasse. Frank Gogarty berated both sides who had allowed hostility to develop between the People's Democracy and the Civil Rights Association. Betty Sinclair announced that she was rejoining the executive.

Still the antagonisms rumbled on, one speaker objecting strongly to the People's Democracy preaching class war and the take-over of Catholic schools. 'These were not Civil Rights Association objectives.'

It was with a heavy sense of responsibility and some foreboding that we of the central executive contemplated Saturday 22 March 1969. Six civil rights parades were to be held in protest about a new Public Order Act proposed by the Stormont Unionists. It turned out to be a day of triumph for the protesters, who carried through the demonstrations as peacefully as they could, although at various flashpoints there were scuffles and a few arrests.

In Enniskillen police blocked off East Bridge Street to 700 civil rights marchers. The marchers sat down and held a meeting on the spot, after refusing to accept an alternative route. Townspeople peered from behind boarded-up windows of local shops as the protesters walked the few hundred yards from Jail Square before coming to a halt at the East Bridge which spans the River Erne. The marchers chanted slogans and waved banners as one of their leaders, Bowes Egan, argued with a District Inspector of the RUC. Paddy Devlin

and James Kennedy, both MPs, and James Lynch stood silently by. Bowes Egan claimed that there were only a few loyalists in the Diamond and that the police would have been well able to prevent any trouble along that route.

In Armagh about one thousand demonstrators gathered in the Market Street where they staged a sit-down and chanted 'We shall overcome'. There were some minor scuffles and five arrests of demonstrators and Paisleyites.

There was a small demonstration in Newry, in which about 300 people took part. The crowd staged a sit-down in the main square and sang civil rights songs. There was only one minor incident when a car tried to push its way through the crowd.

In Derry 500 extra police had been drafted in. The demonstration turned out to be the quietest ever in the city. Apart from one short vicious struggle at the War Memorial the parade went off quietly. There were about five and a half thousand marchers who passed through the familiar route, Duke Street, over Craigavon Bridge to Carlisle Road and the Diamond. The cause of the fracas at the War Memorial was a counter demonstrator, surrounded by his associates, waving a Union Jack. A Land Rover containing a detained marcher was attacked with stones and coins. The usual leaders—John Hume, Ivan Cooper and Claude Wilton—led the parade. The only damage was a few smashed windows.

Lung power won the day for 200 Paisleyites against only thirty civil rights demonstrators in Belfast. With only a couple of minor scuffles the affair turned out to be more farcical than dramatic.

The character of the civil rights movement was gradually changing, possibly maturing. A forty-car motorcade left County Fermanagh on 11 June 1969 to expose a Unionist move to safeguard two County Council seats in the reorganisation of local Councils. This had been promised in the heralded Downing Street Declaration. The method the Unionists proposed to use was to build fifty new houses, not in Newtownbutler, where they were required, but three and a half miles away in the rural area of Donagh. This would ensure that the two Newtownbutler seats on the County Council would be returned by Unionists. Larry Murphy, the press officer of the Fermanagh Civil Rights Association, explained that 'the Unionists hold the village seats on marginal majorities. If the



new houses were built in Newtownbutler there is a strong possibility that the seats would be lost, for most of the people on the housing waiting list are Catholic. Donagh however returns two Nationalist Councillors with very good majorities, so the Unionists won't be scared of losing two seats.'

The motorcade passed through the various Fermanagh towns. A police escort was provided through Belfast to Stormont where representations were made. There were other attempts at boundary manipulation to which the Civil Rights Association drew attention, such as in the case of the crossing of the County Tyrone border to Unionist Fivemiletown by the Fermanagh Council to pick up the necessary votes in order to secure the Unionist majority. The division of County Derry into two areas, one of which stretched into County Antrim, was equally suspect, the Civil Rights Association pointed out.

In Dungiven a new NICRA tactic was put to the test. Three thousand Orangemen marched through the predominantly Catholic town on 28 June for a banner unfurling ceremony. Scores of extra police were drafted in as busloads of Orangemen from all parts swelled the normally small Orange parade.

Dungiven's population, from behind closed doors and shuttered windows, saw their civil rights placards and posters being ripped down by squads of Orangemen, some wearing their sashes. One poster said 'We are allowing you to march because we believe in civil rights for all.' An NBC cameraman was struck as he was filming the marchers.

Among those who stayed behind closed doors was Ivan Cooper, the kingpin of the Derry Citizens Action Committee and Member of Parliament for the area.

Moderate members of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association had a premonition of impending disaster when banner headlines appeared in the *Sunday Press* of 29 June 1969, 'Platform Row by C.R.' It was referring to events at a demonstration of three thousand supporters in Strabane on the previous day.

Eamonn McCann accused the members of the Stormont opposition of selling out to the Government by accepting Capt. O'Neill's timetable of reform, and he coupled with this the name of Austin Currie. He also attacked Senator Edward Kennedy as 'mouthing emotionalism' and questioned his attitude to the Vietnam War and the American Negro Rights

struggle. The chairman of the meeting, Ivan Barr, a member of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association executive, called him to order for making a political speech. Other speakers listed grievances arising from job and housing discrimination but Miss Bernadette Devlin described this as sectarianism and went on to censure the Nationalist Party. 'I was elected an MP to Westminster as a Unity candidate but if this is to be the same kind of unity as Austin Currie's the sooner you get rid of me the better. Let there be no mistake about it, I follow Eamonn McCann's policy.'

The Belfast branch of the J.F. Kennedy Association condemned Mr McCann for a biased attack saying that both Ted Kennedy and his two brothers had always identified with Dr Martin Luther King and the senator had frequently called for the withdrawal of troops from Vietnam.

Mr James Callaghan and Lord Stonham came to Belfast at the end of August 1969. Their aim was to consult with as many separate groups as possible. It was arranged that some members of the executive would have an interview with Lord Stonham. I was one of the chosen representatives.

When the meeting assembled I was horrified to discover that there were two extra representatives for the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association present whom I had never seen before. This was the first time such an irregularity had occurred. Had I only known it, this was to be the first shock of many. What could I do? To create a fuss would have done more harm than good, so I had to accept them. One of these people took an aggressive approach to Lord Stonham. Truculence was a poor disposition on such an occasion. I showed Lord Stonham a copy of *The Plain Truth* and asked if he had seen it before. He had not, but promised to read the copy I gave him. To my intense satisfaction, a few days later I had a letter from him requesting a further eight copies.

In the book *John Hume* by Barry White, I am reported as having said to Lord Stonham concerning discrimination, 'The next time I have a case of discrimination I won't send it to you. I'll burn a street of houses.' I cannot imagine myself being so militant, especially on such an important occasion. I have no recollection of saying anything like that to him or anyone else at any time.

In the very fluid situation of Northern Ireland it was a

wholetime job safeguarding the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association flanks. We found it necessary in the executive to disown the Monaghan Civil Rights Association, where a civil rights office was opened and literature from the South became available. We made it clear that we never had organised any meetings south of the border, nor did we intend to do so in the future. In a separate news item in the *Tyrone Democrat* of 31 October 1969 a Fianna Fáil spokesman, referring to a controversy concerning a meeting in Cork, is alleged to have said that 'All these Communists are coming down from the North'. This indicated that the Republic of Ireland did not realise that we in the civil rights movement were working together, and provided that any one group did not dominate, we were happy to continue in this manner.

If the background had not been so serious some civil rights activities would have verged on the absurd. In the right-wing *Impartial Reporter* newspaper of Enniskillen, on 25 February 1970, there was a picture that one can be sure no Unionist would have ever considered imaginable. It showed James Lynch of Roslea, our Campaign member, Councillor Jim Donnelly, and Mr Frank McManus, chairman of the Fermanagh Civil Rights Association, seated *on the dais of the Fermanagh Council Chamber*. At the time when this photograph was taken there was uproar, with the opposing groups singing 'We shall Overcome' and 'The Sash'. The occasion was a motion proposed by Jim Donnelly and seconded by Philip McCarron for the abolition of the Council. There was a serious and responsible contribution to the debate by the anti-Unionist members, who covered most of the administrative misdeeds by the majority. This was countered by the usual stonewalling tactics, when the Unionists listed all the good things that happened and refused to deal with the injustices. In the end the motion was, of course, lost by twenty-eight votes to ten. Whereupon the opposition members left the chamber, promising never to return. The Chairman, Captain J. Brooke MP (later Lord Brookeborough) announced an adjournment. Shortly afterwards the doors of the Chamber swung open and in marched a group of twenty-two civil rights and People's democracy members led by Mr McManus. They took up the principal positions reserved for the Unionist majority

members. There was stamping of feet, cheering, jeering and applause. Eventually, after a request by the police, the demonstrators left quietly, under protest. They had held up the Council for about an hour. The demonstration had a sequel when on 5 October of that year police took into custody twenty people associated with it who refused to pay fines. Among these were Frank McManus, our Jim Donnelly and James Lynch of Roslea.

James Lynch who died some time after his prison sentence had been completed, was the father of the village of Roslea. This fine local representative had fought unsuccessfully for years to have a sewage system installed, but was always thwarted. (A frequent ploy of Unionists to prevent houses being built where the occupiers were likely to be Catholics was to deny sewage, and thereby to deny houses.)

The Annual General Meeting of the Armagh Civil Rights Association for the election of office bearers was scheduled for mid-January 1970. John Donaghy and I were delegated by the central body to act as scrutineers. Anticipating a left-wing takeover I wrote to Cardinal Conway's secretary, Father James Lenny (later Bishop Lenny) telling him of my concern. I asked him to persuade a few solid tradesmen and their wives to attend this open meeting and vote for moderate candidates. I stressed to him not to involve the local 'gentry' because there was bitterness amongst working people that these had distanced themselves in the struggle for justice. One person who should have known a lot better was heard to say that 'there was no housing problem in Armagh'. This of course was nonsense. I recall being brought by Tom McLaughlin to a house where there was such overcrowding that the only bedroom the tenants possessed accommodated, not only the man and his wife, but all their children—I vividly remember that there were so many beds in the room that I could not see the floor!

After an emotive and persuasive speech by Michael Farrell to a relatively young audience, a vote was taken. The incorruptible Donaghy and I counted the votes. The moderates lost virtually all the positions on the local executive by six or seven votes. My motives had obviously been doubted, and not for the first time, by the Catholic establishment.

Within a week the Red Flag was flying from a window of the Republican Club at Ogle Street in the Primatial City of Armagh.

Meetings of the Civil Rights Association were held in Belfast in the late evenings, often in Frank Gogarty's house, where his kindness and generosity were boundless. I often wondered what Mrs Gogarty, a gentle Frenchwoman, made of these large-scale invasions of her privacy.

At this time the strain of attending the meetings and trying to follow all that was going on was almost insupportable. Up until now there was no trouble dealing with innovatory ideas: Unionist politicians do not pose this problem! Now we had to cope with clever young people whose motives at every meeting were now suspect.

One of the reasons why the central executive had changed so much was that, with typical and regrettable Irish impulsiveness, John McAnerney and his three colleagues had left the executive in March 1969. The four people who replaced them were elected in contravention of the constitution at an Extraordinary General Meeting. Three further co-options had then been made to add to the previous co-options which had occurred since the last Annual General Meeting. The result was that the Belfast tail was wagging the country dog.

To attend meetings John Donaghy and I drove the forty miles from Dungannon, picking up Brid Rodgers on the way in Lurgan. We were at that time the only three members of the executive who did not owe allegiance to any political party. Added to the physical distance from the centre and anxiety to keep in touch and have some control of events, there was the further problem of my medical practice behind me. I was at that time the press officer. Before we left the meeting for home the press release was composed to be given to the papers after the meeting was over by the assistant press officer Kevin Boyle. At least twice when we arrived home there was a different press statement on the midnight news from the one to which we had been a party.

Civil rights meetings often lasted till 2 a.m. This was a common occurrence, both centrally and at area meetings, a stratagem the People's Democracy shared with the 'Looney Left' of the British Labour Party and leftists trying to take over trade unions. Other civil rights members had businesses

to superintend and family commitments to fulfil which compelled them to leave at a reasonable hour. When they did, the militants proposed suspension of Standing Orders and went on to carry resolutions which mature adults would not have countenanced. Added to this, meetings of the executive had become frenetic, there were tensions between members and, as we were soon to learn, information was being suppressed.

Frank Gogarty, the chairman, was emotional by nature, although the kindest of men. I remember once saying to my fellow passengers on the trip to Belfast, 'These people are in such a fervid state that I would not be surprised to find when we arrive that they had levitated to half way between the floor and the ceiling.'

At this time the Campaign for Social Justice had been notified by friends in the USA, and very aggrieved friends at that, that the First Annual Conference sponsored by the National Association for Irish Justice was to be held in New York on 7, 8, and 9 November. That Conference was to be attended by Bernadette Devlin, Frank Gogarty, Eamonn McCann, Kevin Boyle and Michael Farrell. What shocked and surprised traditional Irish-American people and clubs such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians was the leftward orientation of the new American movement. Consequently the eighteen organisations which made up the Irish Action Committee had come together and banned the Association for Irish Justice to which, in the early stages, some of them had belonged. This National Association for Irish Justice had described itself as the American Affiliate of the Civil Rights Association of Northern Ireland. It was socialist rather than nationalist.

Brian Heron, its leader, was himself a revolutionary. He had played an active part in the grape pickers' strike in California and had attempted to organise the Greenland fishermen into a militant union. He supported the Black Panther Movement. The office of the National Association for Irish Justice in East 23rd Street, New York was also the office of Mr Cathal Goulding. In short the NAIJ existed to promote revolution in Ireland, north and south.

Mr Proinsias MacAonghusa (*Irish Times* 9.11.69) interviewed Mr Heron. He asked for an explanation 'as to what happened to funds collected in the United States by Miss

Bernadette Devlin MP. Miss Devlin appeared to be sponsored by the NAIJ while on a fund-collecting tour for non-denominational relief work in the North.—According to his version the money had been divided into three parts and deposited in a Belfast bank, one part for direct relief work, the second for civil rights, the third will help in the defence of political prisoners’.

At the first opportunity I asked to see the minutes of the meeting where the National Association for Irish Justice was appointed by the Civil Rights Association as the only organisation to act on its behalf in the United States. None was produced.

On 4 December 1969, with the deck lifting under our feet, we three felt it necessary to make public our anxiety about the way the Civil Rights Association was tending. In our joint press release we told how Frank Gogarty and two other members of the executive, Kevin Boyle and Michael Farrell, with other People’s Democracy colleagues, had departed as representatives of NICRA, on a speaking tour organised by the National Association for Irish Justice, without telling the other members of the executive of their plans, nor was there a minute available to inform the other members.

We felt, and said it openly, that the country membership should be aware of these things, since they made up the bulk of the movement. We reminded people of ‘the savage attacks by speech and leaflet of People’s Democracy on Ivan Cooper, Gerry Fitt, Aidan Corrigan, John Hume, Austin Currie and on the Nationalist Party generally’. Whatever the views that might be held in some quarters about this party, it had much loyal country support. To antagonise this was divisive of the civil rights movement. We objected to ‘the hawking of shoddy news sheets at Provincial Council meetings’. We ended our statement by declaring that we would soldier on till the Annual General Meeting on 14 February 1970.

John Donaghy followed this up by an interview he gave to the *Tyrone Democrat*. He pointed out that all but five members of the central executive came from Belfast, where there was relatively little civil rights activity compared to the provinces. John objected strongly to Michael Farrell, an executive member, using the civil rights platform to put over his own political views. All he asked of the People’s Democracy

members on the executive was 'to do as the Republicans and other political groups had done, i.e. not to use civil rights platforms for political gain'. John Donaghy went on to counter various accusations by Mr Farrell against himself and myself of lack of militancy, being right-wing Tories in search of power for ourselves, and not being prepared to help working people. He reminded Mr Farrell of his long history as a Dungannon Councillor and a civil rights activist. He recalled that he had attended an executive meeting forty-eight hours prior to the departure of the party for the USA, when the trip was not mentioned. He ended by complaining about how frequently he had requested financial statements from the executive without result. Needless to say the *exposé* by the three of us produced a strong reaction. In a press release the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association executive condemned us 'in the strongest possible terms'. The press release went on to say that 'a detailed refutation of the points raised would be issued shortly'. We have no record in the Campaign files of this happening.

We attended our last executive meeting in the run up to the 1970 Annual Meeting due to be held on 14 and 15 February. In the two days before applications closed for membership eligible to vote in the 1970 elections to the executive, the numbers went from 380 to 560. (To elicit numerical precision at this stage was very difficult, but eventually Bríd Rodgers prised the membership list from the secretary and it had jumped as detailed.)

John McAnerney, a former secretary of NICRA, observed to the press that 'it seems pretty evident that there has been a takeover by people who are not really out for civil rights, but who use the movement for putting forward their extreme left wing views'.

Before the Annual General Meeting was held Bríd Rodgers, John Donaghy and I indicated with 'sadness in our hearts' that we had decided not to stand for election to the executive, because, as we said, 'the civil rights movement had ceased to be what it originally was—a broadly based movement commanding widespread respect. It had lost its sense of unity and its mass support.'

The People's Democracy let it be known that they would not seek seats on the executive but would continue to be



individual members. Also declining to be executive members were Andrew Boyd, John McAnerney, Fred Heatley and Tom Conaty, all of Belfast, as well as Joe O'Hagan (Lurgan), Aidan Corrigan and Mary Hughes (Dungannon), and P.J. Rafferty (Carrickmore) who withdrew for personal reasons.

The meeting itself was large, and at times turbulent. To our great annoyance the press was excluded. Before the voting for the fourteen-strong executive took place we saw a sheet with a list of names being circulated among Republican Club members.

The outcome of the election for the 1970 executive was a takeover by pro-Goulding Official Republicans and Communists. Kevin Agnew (275) Republican Clubs; Frank Gogarty (263) republican; Malachy McGurran (251) Republican Clubs; Ann Hope (247) Communist; Liam McMillan (233) Republican Clubs; Madge Davidson (231) Communist; Denis Cassin (218) Republican Clubs; Ivan Barr (206) Republican Clubs; Vincent McDowell (201) republican; Mrs Edwina Stewart (201) Communist; Dalton Kelly (199) republican; F. Patterson (167); John D. Stewart (132) Northern Ireland Labour Party; Rebecca Mc Glade (124) republican. Subsequently Mr Kevin Agnew was elected chairman and Frank Gogarty vice-chairman.

During the meeting a proposal by Michael Farrell calling on members to oppose injustice in the Republic of Ireland, on a vote of ninety to eighty-eight, was referred back to the new executive. By the time the resolution was put to the meeting 300 of the 500 of the original attenders had left for home.

The 1970 Annual General Meeting was of course a watershed for the civil rights movement. Letters to the press (mostly unsigned as is customary in Northern Ireland, because people do not want to invite a brick thrown through their front window, or worse) regretted that the executive's main aim from now on seemed to be a socialist all-Ireland republic. Because of the loss of responsible middle-of-the-road direction, some letters said, the concern was now no longer for reform but for revolution.

From then on, by not resigning from the movement we three were able to hold a watching brief on NICRA activities. After the 1970 AGM, as onlookers, we watched the executive

blunder along, often at cross purposes. Here are a few isolated events, as small groups, making piecemeal efforts, allowed NICRA to wind down.

There was a newspaper statement by the chairman of the Dungannon Civil Rights Committee, Aidan Corrigan, on 16 February 1970, in which he attacked the People's Democracy. The subject was a debate on the Ulster Defence Regiment. The PD claimed that Austin Currie had absented himself deliberately from the meeting when in fact he had been misinformed about the date. When the meeting took place the People's Democracy 'attempted to shout down Jack Hassard, a respected Protestant and a tried and tireless civil rights worker, when he spoke. The People's Democracy also made personal attacks on Messrs Hume and Currie. The Armagh PD are unwelcome and unwanted at future civil rights meetings.' declared Aidan Corrigan.

On 1 March the People's Democracy announced that they would seriously consider not participating in civil rights marches because of the sectarian-type speeches made in Enniskillen by the chairman of Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, Mr Kevin Agnew, and Mr Aidan Corrigan. Mr Cyril Toman, another PD member, claimed that 'the executive of Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association had been elected by underhand methods following an alliance between what was now termed Official Sinn Fein and the Communist Party'.

On 13 March the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association organiser, Mr K. McCorry, speaking in Toome, described the People's Democracy as 'ultra Left' and the Dungannon group as 'ultra Right', at a time when people were calling for the bickering to stop.

On 16 April NICRA announced that the retention of Stormont was its official policy. This was supported in a further statement by the Communist Party of Ireland—'the abolition of Stormont would solve nothing.' This drew a shoal of indignant letters to the press.

Twice on the night of 12 May 1970 Frank Gogarty's house was attacked with stones. Most of the windows in his house had previously been broken, and one side of the house had already been almost completely boarded up. When his appeal

against a mandatory six months prison sentence was lost on 26 February 1971 Frank Gogarty was sent to gaol. Knowing him, I can assume that Frank lost his head during a relatively minor incident. Some time after this, Frank Gogarty died.

A branch of the Campaign for Social Justice Northern Ireland was formed in Birmingham and another in Coventry. We were unable to prevent them using our name without vexatious and time-consuming litigation. Another branch, which was formed in Manchester, ceased to use the Campaign's name when we requested this.

The Birmingham 'branch' was in effect a civil rights organisation of sorts. It sponsored a march in Enniskillen on 28 November 1970. By pressing the SDLP to participate, these people helped to widen the split between the moderates and the militants in the civil rights movement because this Fermanagh march was an almost completely republican event.

Frank McManus was jailed in a most selective way by the Northern Ireland judiciary. He was given a six months prison sentence in late January 1971 for taking part in a banned march. Three members of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association executive and other prominent marchers were not prosecuted. Some marchers were fined one pound.

The Annual General Meeting of the Dungannon Civil Rights Association was held on 24 February 1971, having been previously adjourned because of the small attendance. There were about 100 members present. There were many disputes from the floor. Jack Hassard accused the Civil Rights Association of alienating Protestants by talking too much about a united Ireland and he described Mr Kevin Agnew, Chairman of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association as 'another Enoch Powell' for his advocacy of 'sending planters back from whence they came'. Jack Hassard reminded those present that he had taken part in the first civil rights march to Dungannon and had then warned that 'under no circumstances should the civil rights movement become a sectarian organisation'. He said that he had appealed to Catholics to join the Ulster Defence Regiment but by their not doing so 'we've handed over the UDR to the B-Specials. This has been a catastrophe from the Catholic point of view'. Mr Agnew asked, 'Who as an Irishman wants to take an oath of

allegiance to the Queen, to wear the UDR uniform and get a gun—especially if you can get a gun without it?'

A new committee was elected. Mrs Bríd McAleer, one of our Campaign members and a civil rights pioneer, declined to go forward on the grounds of ill-health. Mr Kevin McCorry the Civil Rights Association organiser, warned that the general situation of the country 'was not good' and that the new committee had an added burden because of the unhealthy situation in Dungannon of the civil rights movement, with various groups and sections sniping at one another.

The next day Ivan Cooper MP issued a statement warning that the Civil Rights Association was being wrecked by some of its own members abusing the platform. Referring to the Dungannon meeting he re-emphasised that it was never the function of the civil rights movement to work for the re-unification of Ireland. 'Non violence is an important base of the movement, that seems to have been lost in the past twelve months. The unity which we once had has been smashed to pieces by a handful of people who have used civil rights as a political weapon.'

At a Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association conference in Dungannon on 24 October 1971 the delegates supported the role of civil disobedience and the rent and rates strike. The conference called on all supporters to refuse to pay radio, television and dog licences and to withhold payment for gas, water and electricity, while farmers were urged to withhold land annuities. It was advised that savings be withdrawn from post offices and other Government schemes.

The conference agreed to arrange other militant activities including disruption of local councils and post offices by sit-ins and pickets. Little came of all this but, needless to say, the Unionists poured scorn and condemnation on the proposals that were made.

Jim Donnelly's wife Margaret, a delicate, retiring lady, was 'kicked and punched senseless' by police on 8 March 1972, as she and her husband were getting into their car after court proceedings. Her husband was similarly attacked and two men who went to their assistance also came in for police treatment. Jim had to carry his wife to the nearby Catholic church and call a doctor. James and Margaret Donnelly were

defendants in court proceedings which resulted from an anti-internment protest in Enniskillen on 18 February (*Fermanagh News* 11.3.72).

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association said in a statement on 1 December 1972 that it could not lend its support to a conference called by the County Antrim executive of the Association because it had been arranged without its approval. The conference was due to be addressed by Mr Frank McManus MP, Mr Aidan Corrigan and Mr Michael Farrell, three people who, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association pointed out, 'were not its members and have consistently tried to destroy the association and sow confusion among our supporters'.

One of our last communications was a sad little letter in the *Irish Times* from Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association headquarters at Marquis Street, Belfast, signed by Edwina Stewart and Madge Davidson. This pointed out that when Frank Gogarty was on the platform at the inaugural meeting of the Irish Civil Rights Association in Dublin, with Mrs Maire Drumm, he was not representing the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association because he had resigned from the executive the week before.

By this time no original civil righter would have given the existing emasculated segment of NICRA the time of day. What had begun as a roaring lion was now only a squeaking mouse. But civil rights had done most of what it had set out to do. Things were far from perfect in Northern Ireland but they were a great deal better. Minorities at any time and in any place are always at some disadvantage. It is the job of the politicians, with patient determination, to oppose abuses and fight for minority rights. Opposition politicians must continue to do this in the future as far ahead as one can see.