

**NATIONAL ARCHIVES****IRELAND**

**Reference Code:** 2000/6/658

**Title:** Eye-witness account of events in Belfast, by Seamus Brady.

**Creation Date(s):** 22 August, 1969

**Level of description:** Item

**Extent and medium:** 13 pages

**Creator(s):** Department of the Taoiseach

**Access Conditions:** Open

**Copyright:** National Archives, Ireland. May only be reproduced with the written permission of the Director of the National Archives.

22 August, 1969

I am sending down from Dundalk Military Post some copies of the Citizen Press which is a bulletin got out inside the barricades in Belfast, also copies which you requested of the Protestant Telegraph with a couple of subscription forms which I hope would be worthwhile taking advantage of. Also I enclose a copy of the forms which are given to victims of the Belfast troubles. One is a claims form for compensation for criminal injuries the other a claims form for compensation for damage to property. You will note that in both forms the person is supposed to report to one of the R.U.C. Stations in the area and have this filled in. I am told in Belfast that very few people are making reports. What is being done is that four Solicitors are giving their services free to the Relief Services at St. Peters Church at the top of the Falls Road and they will put in the claims in block form.

This begins the Report now proper.

Belfast today is a powder-keg. The Catholic population with some of their Protestant neighbours are now in enclaves behind barricades on both sides of the Falls Road and the Ardoyne area at the top of the Crumlin Road.

There are nearly 35 - 40,000 people behind these barricades.

These are fully manned each night from 9 pm by men from the different Catholic Parishes along the Falls Road and at Ardoyne.

No one is allowed in after 10 pm unless one can establish ones identity.

The British troops remain outside the barricades. The troops are mostly along the Falls Road and at the roads leading on to the Shankill Road where most of the Paisleyite trouble-makers live. There are also a concentration of troops around the Ardoyne area and they have also sealed off with barbed wire rows of houses such as Bombay Street off the Falls Road and Hooker Street off Crumlin Road which were burned out.

The present total of persons who have either been burned out or who have left their homes in Belfast because of threats can be

reached 7,000. A total of 400 houses have been either burned or partly destroyed while an area of two acres of factories along the Falls Road near Divis Street have been gutted. This was done by the Paisleyite mobs who invaded the area from the Shankill Road district on Thursday afternoon and again on Thursday evening. The Catholic Parish school of St. Galls was also destroyed by fire in Waterville Street. Again 40 houses in Cashmire Road in St. Paul's Parish were also gutted on the Friday night.

It is important that the facts are established as to how this trouble began in Belfast. The first real trouble in Belfast as I have now established from different witnesses started on the Tuesday after the 12th of July when the so-called Shankill Defence League held a meeting in Ohio Street off the Crumlin Road. There were thousands of Paisleyites at that meeting. John McKeague the self-styled Chairman of the Shankill Defence Association shouted to the crowd over loudspeakers "let no more Papists in here". Someone shouted up to him "what about those who already have". His reply over the loudhailer was "I leave that to yourselves".

Tension followed and there was fighting that weekend between Catholics and Protestants in Cupar Street which runs between the Falls and Springfield Roads in the direction of Shankill Road.

The allegation that Catholics at Unity Walk Flats threw stones at the Young Orangemen's Procession which followed the 12th is untrue. Even John McQuade the Unionist M.P. admitted this two weeks ago in the Belfast Telegraph.

The facts are that this Parade was brought in through the Flats which are a series of 8 or 9 storey buildings. The Parade went in through the buildings and where there is a majority of Catholic residents. A woman was struck on the hand by an Orangeman with one of the decorative spears which they carry or cannon holders and this led to some trouble which Police stopped.

Catholics were moving out of houses in the Crumlin Road area as early as 3 weeks ago. This followed threats made to certain Catholic homes in the area by Paisleyites. One woman told me that when she moved out of her home in Crumlin Road R.U.C. men stood at the street corner and said "We cannot guarantee any protection".

The real trouble in Belfast erupted on the Thursday evening when the B Specials were called out by proclamation of the Government all over the Six Counties. I am told by a contact in the Special Branch of the R.U.C. [REDACTED] that, that evening the B Specials in Belfast mis-interpreted the order and assumed that they were being put out to get revenge on Catholics in Belfast for what had happened in the Bogside in Derry. My contact tells me that the Specials went to Police Barracks throughout Belfast and seized the R.U.C. weapons. This is borne out in interviews which I had with a number of people in the Falls Road who were there when the B Specials came in from the Shankill Road. For one thing the B Specials are equipped in districts outside urban areas with Lee Enfield World War Two Rifles. In Belfast they are equipped with Point 38 Revolvers like the R.U.C. But the B Special forces who invaded the Falls Road Area on Thursday night were firing Sterling Sub-Machine Guns. The Parish Priest of St Pauls Dr Gerald Montique, former Senior Dean of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth told me "I was standing in the street when the first thing was a number of smoke bombs were thrown and then Specials in private cars came driving in from the Shankill Road area down the side-streets. I went into the Presbytery out of the way to avoid the shots which were going on. They were firing indiscriminately."

My Special Branch contact also tells me that at one stage early on Friday morning B Specials and R.U.C. engaged in a gun battle lasting nearly  $\frac{1}{2}$  an hour in Percy Street.

The B Specials finally left the area some time early on Friday morning but they were followed by the Orange mobs from the Shankill Road urged on by people like McQuade the M.P. or by McKeague the leader of the Shankill Defence League. They rampaged up the Falls Road, burned out houses in Bombay Street, and threw petrol bombs into a number of Public Houses in the Falls Road. They also smashed windows and threw petrol bombs into factories on the Falls Road which are now gutted.

The re-action to this was described to me as follows "the people of the Falls Road on Friday evening when British troops were beginning to move into position came out like ants. They dug the paving

stones to make barricades, they seized buses, bread-vans, lorries and blocked all the entrances to their homes from the Falls Road.

The Falls Road is now open but all the roads leading from it on either side in the Catholic area are barricaded at both ends. According to John McQuade the M.P. the explanation of the burnings as given in an interview in the Belfast Telegraph of August, 21, a copy of which I send you herewith, "the burnings were carried out by IRA men and the Protestants had to look on helplessly, he claims, while IRA men burned out Catholic families.

This is the type of dishonest propaganda which is being put out by the whole Unionist machine both the right-wing, and the centre-wing and liberal-wing in the Six Counties at present. It is completely answered by interviews with some of the victims of the type which I will give here below.

There appears to have been fairly severe gun battles late Thursday night and early Friday morning between a number of people with arms - most of them IRA or old-IRA men and B Specials along the Falls Road area.

I spoke to one man who told me that he with three others, armed with a shot gun, a rifle and two revolvers held off a force of about 100 - 150 B Specials in Cupar Street on late Thursday night and early Friday morning. They counted 17 Specials downed. By that the man meant shot but he could not say whether they had been wounded or killed.

One of the four men who took part in this battle is now in a Hospital in Dundalk with bullet wounds.

This man is looked on as a local hero and I would not be given his name but he is reported to have set himself up as a sniper with a rifle in a tree with a pocket-full of bullets and to have held off B Specials throughout the night.

It is quite possible that a number of Specials and possibly RUC men are dead. My Special Branch contact had heard reports of this but could not confirm it. It is no secret that a number of Specials who were shot in the 1920-1921 troubles were secretly

buried and the same thing may be happening again.

Going back to the Specials it is not yet clear whether they have handed up the R.U.C. Sterling Sub-Machine Guns which they seized at R.U.C. Barracks in Belfast on last Thursday night. This would explain the anxiety shown by the British Military Authorities in general to have B Specials in Derry and Belfast hand up their weapons. I have made some notes on the B Specials.

The only requirement for becoming a B Special is to be a member of an Orange Club. There is no educational or physical test of any kind. The Special is paid a yearly fee when not on duty. He is also paid something for doing weekly training and he is paid at the full rate of Trainee Policeman when called out on full service. They are allowed to keep their arms at home.

There is some evidence also that B Specials and possibly the Police are using Dum Dum bullets. One bullet picked up in Creighen Street in Derry was Point 38 Calibre and had been nicked across the face.

The bullet which killed the 9 year old boy in Belfast created havoc by the tearing through three walls before it hit the boy in his bed and was obviously dum dum. It is also current in Belfast that a number of IRA men have got through to the barricaded area. It is also likely that some arms have come in. There are reports of arms being landed at Cushendun~~g~~ on the Antrim coast but this I have <sup>e</sup>ben unable to confirm.

The feeling inside the barricades in Belfast with those with whom I spoke and they are the people who are running the show, is that they are awaiting help from the South. By this I mean military help. They can see no going back to what was before. Like Derry the Taoiseach's address on Radio and Television had a tremendous effect here. I did find some of the Clergy who were against any intervention from the South and who accused the Government in Dublin of "playing politics", but the bulk of the people inside the barricades who are running the refugee centres and who are manning barricades are completely committed to an end of the Stormont regime and return to jurisdiction of an Irish Government.

One incident during the attacks at Clonard was that in which a man jumped on an R.U.C. jeep. He jumped on the top of the jeep and tossed a petrol bomb through a window. The jeep was later used by the Catholics to make a barricade.

Catholics who were involved in the fight also told me that on the Friday morning R.U.C. and Specials used an ambulance to get into the Leeson Street area of the Falls Road. There was heavy fighting at Leeson Street with firing on both sides.

Now follows a full account on the refugees side.

The centre of activity for the whole Falls area as far as life behind the barricades is concerned centres on St Peters Catholic School at Andersonstown. Here voluntary workers, young boys, girls, doctors, chemists, professional business-men are all working in different units.

There is one special legal section set up to deal with claims for damage or for personal injury. This is being manned by clerical staff and has the assistance of four Catholic Solicitors. They will process all claims and submit them in block to the authorities. They voluntary workers are also compiling a street-by-street register of families who have been burned out of their houses or who have been forced to leave their homes. They will do this by checking at all relief centres of which there are about a dozen in Belfast., all in the Falls area or at Ardoyne. They also are operating a 24 hour service with vans and cars to take out families who are threatened. Two families were taken out at 3 o'clock today out of the Newtownards Road area in East Belfast. This is an area where there has been no trouble reported so far, but there are Catholic families in this strong Paisleyite area who have been receiving threatening notices pushed through their letter boxes. These families are given one hour to get out.

The voluntary workers are very badly equipped. They have no heavy trucks. In one case they are using a small delivery van used by Charrington & Kinahan. This van in question was seized and belonged to a former Lord Mayor of Belfast.

This voluntary removal service, if one may call it so, is now

standing by for calls from families as far away as Ballymena or Toombridge where threatening letters are also arriving.

The bill for petrol for these voluntary workers getting families out has risen to £300 in 5 days. One of them told me "we have shuttled thousands of people into one centre out to other centres and then over the border to safety.

Reports that families are coming back are untrue. What is happening is that menfolk who have left families over the border are coming back to see what they can pick up in their shattered homes or to see if they can resume work".

The voluntary workers at St Peters are very bitter about the Six County State Welfare Service. The State Welfare Service have set up an office at St Peters in one of the school rooms but some of the voluntary leaders there told me "the State Welfare Service have done nothing. We have had offers from all over Ireland and even from Britain. But we have had nothing at all from our own State Welfare Service".

The scene at this centre last Friday and indeed last Thursday and Friday must make one ponder deeply on the Northern situation. One Welfare worker told me of Catholic families coming in here with children burned, fathers with broken heads and weeping women - all of them terrified".

They are very bitter in Belfast about the Red Cross. They told me "the British Red Cross has not even given us a bandage. We asked for the International Red Cross but we were told that they could only come in at the request of the British Red Cross. We have not seen much of the Irish Red Cross either. This criticism was made to me last weekend in Derry on our own Red Cross.

The voluntary worker went on "transport is a big problem for us. Some families only get an hours notice to get out and we have to get down to them as fast as we can".

The Protection Authorities in Belfast on the Paisleyite side is also encouraging some Protestant families to get out. But this has been done purely as a piece of window-dressing. The only one case of a Protestant being burned out was an elderly woman known as "skinny

Lizzie" to the local residents. In Hooker Street, at the top of Crumlin Road. This old lady had a shop and has been living there untouched for 40 years. But she was silly enough during the troubles when Catholics were being forced out of their homes by an Orange mob last Thursday and Friday to hang out a Union Jack at the height of the trouble. Catholic workers freely admitted that she had been burned out by Catholics who had been enraged by this gesture. St Peters has also set up a full medical centre staffed with Doctors and Nurses who are available 24 hours round the clock. The St. John Ambulance men wear white tin helmets instead of their usual caps. There is a room full of baby foods, another which is full of drugs - voluntarily supplied by chemists along the Falls Road. This Hospital is preparing itself for surgical cases if necessary. Their attitude is that the fighting has yet to come. One Catholic who is helping at St Peters said that it is estimated that the B Specials fired 10,000 rounds of ammunition in the Falls Road area on Thursday night and Friday morning. He told me that he saw two Policemen, he was not sure whether they were B Specials or R.U.C. shoot during the Cupar Street fighting. This was the scene of the most fiercest gun battle and it was here that one of the four men involved said that counted 17 B Specials downed. The Refugee workers have taken over partly finished flats owned by the Northern Ireland Housing Trust at Andersonstown and they are putting families in there as swatters. The Trust has agreed to accept these families as tenants and the matter is now being negotiated. But these flats are often in a very unfinished state.

Q.

It was here that I spoke to some of the most pathetic cases of refugees. Arthur Maguire, with his wife and six children were forced out of their home last Friday in Bombay St., Belfast, when a mob attacked at one end of the street from the Shankhill area. He said "I got the six children and five from the people next door, eleven children in all, into my car and drove them to safety. Then I went back for my wife and the couple next door. The time was 4.30pm. Two shots were fired from the crowd of Paisleyites at the end of the street. I knew by the sound of the firing that the shots were 38 point bullets which hit the wall above my head. My wife and three of the children are staying with me at a sister's of hers at Ladybrook, near Anderson town. Another of our children is staying with a teacher friend of ours and two others are with another relative. I went back to see my house from the British Military closed-off Bombay St.. It has been plundered and all the houses on either side of it have now been burnt out."

Fifty Six houses in Waterville St., others in Bombay St., all in Cashmir Road and the houses in Hooker St. have all been destroyed. The refugee workers reckon that as well as Four Hundred homes destroyed, there are probably a Thousand homes damaged one way or another. Another refugee, 63 year old John Cullen, told me "I have now been burnt out of Cooper St. three times in my lifetime, in 1920, 1921 and now in 1969. This is my second evacuation. I did Twenty-two years in the British Army and was evacuated at Dunkirk. When the B Specials hand in their arms, I'll hand in the lumps of coal that I was throwing at them during last Thursday Night in Belfast."

One of the most pathetic cases, and I am not giving names for security reasons, is that of Mrs. X. She is 20 years old, a young blonde whose husband is a window cleaner in Belfast. She has two children, Michael, aged two and Stephen, aged three. See Fennell pictures of these. She lived in Roden St., off the Falls Road. Five weeks ago, her mother bought them her little terraced house for £50. She told me " Last Thursday, we got a letter to get out, or be burned out. It said we'd be burned out by Friday. I left with the children and some of my furniture on Friday and went to my husband's sister who has six children. We were terribly crowded. I had to sleep on a chair, and my

two children had to sleep on the floor. Then the refugee workers brought us up to Andersontown and put us into one of the new flats." The original house in Roden St. has now been partly destroyed. Mrs. X. and her two children are now living four flights up in a partly furnished flat. She has to walk up and down with the pram and the two children on a stone staircase that has no safety rail on the outside. She has to cook on a fuel bunker outside her flat because, while she has been given a cooker by the refugee workers, they're afraid to use the gas inside the house. She had no electric light until yesterday. I spoke to Mrs. B., who is 38 years of age, and who, with her husband, is buying out her house on the Crumlin Road for £1850 on a mortgage. She told me "Only the Gypsies who were around the area that day came and helped our families, we would never have got out. Also Father Columba, a Passionist at Ardoyne Retreat, ~~worked in disguise as a workman with the gipsies and got out furniture out in their spring carts.~~ ~~worked in disguise as a workman with the gipsies and got out furniture out in their spring carts.~~ worked in disguise as a workman with the gipsies and got out furniture out in their spring carts. Hundreds of Protestants looked out and jeered at the Catholics getting out. R.U.C. men stood at the street corner and looked on without taking any action. Mrs B said "I went to Tennent Street Station and reported that I had been threatened and was getting out".

*Follow.*

1

They told me "We can do nothing"

The refugee centre at St. Peter's is a chronicle of human misery. One of the refugee workers told me "we had children here with no parents. We have parents looking for their children. There are still three children unaccounted for. We know they're alive but they are mixed up in some refugee camp without proper identity. "One nine year-old boy who turned up here identified himself when he said "My Daddy puts out Union Jacks". We sent him off to a Protestant Relief Centre".

Most of the flats which are taken over for refugee camps at Anderson Town have no water. They use a water tap on the roadway. But as one woman said "we are lucky we have a roof over our heads"

I understand from the Bishops House that the Clergy are co-operating with the relief workers in preparing a complete file of all damage and of all incidents during the two real days of terror in Belfast last week. This will be prepared by way of affidavits. I would think that the best means of getting this when it is compiled is to apply to the Bishop of Down and Connor because he is handling a committee privately, which is undertaking this work. But the barricades still remain in Belfast. After dark no one moves in the Falls Road except the British military who pose behind their barbed wire barricades at the entrance to every little narrow street.

All public houses in the centre of the city close by voluntary agreement at 7.30 p.m. None of the centre city cinemas opens at all.

The St. Peter's Schools refugee centre it should be explained does not house any refugees beyond the cases which are treated in the Medical centre if they require beds. But what it is doing is maintaining a food distribution centre with ration cards which are issued to refugee families who are now housed with other families all in the flats which have been taken over at Anderson

town. The people running the refugee centre tell me they expect many more families to come in from outlying areas as the threats to burn out Catholics continue.

The situation in Dungannon is described as explosive where 80% of the population are reputed to be behind the Paisleyites and where Catholics are afraid to venture outside after dark.

The International Press Corps which was certainly astounded by what it saw in Belfast on Thursday and Friday last is now being given the treatment by all British and Six County Governments. The B.B.C. has been quiet blatant. It has stated in national local broadcasts that the Unity Walk trouble was caused "when missiles were thrown from Roman Catholic flats at an Orange Procession". This has been shown to be absolutely false and yet the B.B.C. has published no retraction. It also stated on Sunday last that 14 Protestant families had been ordered out of Grosvenor Road area under threat - obviously by Catholics. I checked this out myself and it is completely untrue.

One little known factor is that there are a number of Protestant families who are remaining in their homes inside the barricaded Catholic areas along the Falls Road. Some of these Protestants fought behind the barricades with stones when the Paisleyite Mob came in after the B Specials last Friday.

The atmosphere along the Shankhill Road is very tense. It is dangerous for anyone with a Dublin registered car to stop or linger around that area as I discovered yesterday. I was looking for copies of the Protestant Telegraph in newsagents shops along the Shankhill Road and I was asked my business by some of the vigilantes which are abroad in the Shankhill area and who man the Protestant barricades.

What gives an extraordinary air to the whole matter is that like the Bogside and Creggan areas of Derry life behind the barricades goes on quite normally. There is lee-way made at most barricades for a pedestrian to squeeze through. Women come out with their shopping bags. And the shops are busy on the Falls Road. In

action there is very heavy traffic as nightseers move up and down the road to look at the damage.

But inside the barricades it is a different story and I cannot see the Catholics of Belfast taking down the barricades unless and until they are given guarantees that the B Specials will be disbanded and the R.U.C. are taken out of the area. They have lost all trust in the Six County administration.

It should also be stressed that there was no political motivation behind this barricade of the Catholic areas in the Falls Road. It was done for sheer fear and the instinct of self preservation by people who were under armed attack.

There were no I.R.A. units in the area when the attack came.

There may be some I.R.A. men but they are Belfast I.R.A. men who are living there and who speedily came to the rescue of the Catholic population that night and the next morning.

The key man in charge of the refugee centre St. Peters is Gerry Maguire. He was interned in 1956/7 in Crumlin Road prison as an I.R.A. man but he has done no shooting or fighting this time. He told me that since the trouble began he has been directing the evacuation of families and organising the different relief sections at St. Peters Schools.

One thing I noticed in Belfast area and that is that refugees Catholics who have moved out are reluctant to give their names. They are afraid to appear on Television or to allow their photographs be taken for publication in the newspapers. As one woman said to me "we may have to go back to the areas from which we were hunted. We cannot afford to say very much therefore.

End.