

JOHN HUME INTERVIEWED BY HENRY KELLY

"Westminster must realise the realities of the situation," says Hume

THE PAST FORTNIGHT in Northern Ireland has been one of the most turbulent, bloody and tragic in the entire 50-year history of the State. As men, women and children died on the streets of Belfast, Derry and Strabane following the

detention of several hundred political prisoners by the Unionist Government, political developments unfolded quickly and at times confusingly.

The single most significant political development has been the rapid and dramatic support

for the call made by Opposition M.P.s at Stormont for civil disobedience from the Catholic community. The situation is now one where every day brings another example of Catholics from all classes and walks of life opting out of

participation in the administration of Northern Ireland.

In the following interview, given in Belfast yesterday, Mr. John Hume, abstentionist S.D.L.P. M.P. for Foyle, talks about recent developments following a dramatic return made by himself and his colleague,

Mr. Ivan Cooper, M.P., to the streets of Derry on Wednesday, during which they were arrested by British troops and showered with water cannon and rubber bullets while offering passive resistance to an Army incursion into the Bog-side.

MASSIVE CAMPAIGN OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE AND PASSIVE RESISTANCE FROM CATHOLIC COMMUNITY FORECAST

Following recent developments in Derry, how do you see the immediate political situation?

I see it developing along the lines of a massive campaign of civil disobedience and passive resistance, and it is my hope that the energies and anger of the people about the present situation will be channelled into passive resistance.

What are your immediate plans now?

My immediate plan is to have a very big rally in Derry on Saturday afternoon, with a wide range of speakers at it, to promote an anti-internment campaign and to promote civil disobedience and passive resistance, and to really channel and harness the people at this time to go in one direction.

What would you like to see happen politically in Northern Ireland at present?

Obviously I would like to see all internees released immediately and the campaign of repression abandoned, and our attitude to the problem accepted, which is that the road to a solution is to deal with the political malaise of Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland problem is not the security problem, as the British Government and Mr. Faulkner are trying to show at the minute, and I think the events since internment have shown that it's not a security problem, that there's not just a small group of agitators in Northern Ireland, that there's a large section of people dissatisfied with the system.

What do you think of the suggestion that a wheel has come full circle and that, particularly in Derry, August, 1971, is not much different from October, 1968, or August, 1969?

I think that that's true in a very good sense in that I sensed in the Bogside the spirit of 1968 returned and reborn, and that is the spirit that we are at present trying to develop, because we think we need an end to the violence. We are in the really terrible situation as Opposition leaders that our views on ending trouble in Northern Ireland are not being accepted. We think that it's political solutions that are required. The Government at Westminster and the Unionists in Northern Ireland think that it's repression that's required. While the repression continues, instability exists and the danger of violence increases. It's against that background that we are trying very hard to channel people into

non-violence, because we do not wish to see real sectarian strife. So we are in that position, and we are not getting much help from the authorities in dealing with it as the events of this week clearly show, but it's against that background that we are making a determined bid to channel all our energies into passive resistance. I believe, in any case, that in the present situation passive resistance is exactly the tactic to use in confrontations with the British Army or any other authority.

What might be called a tremendous lawnmower of opposition to the civil authority has started here. It started with the decision of Opposition M.P.s to withdraw from Stormont. Now we have a situation where the vast majority of Catholic people do not want to be governed by the present Stormont situation, that they are one by one gradually dropping out of society almost. Do you see the Catholic population really opting out?

That's exactly as I see it. Our decision to withdraw was an act of political judgment. Many people at the time questioned the wisdom of that judgment. We took it on the basis of the fact that we realised that Westminster policy was drifting towards, and that in fact a decision on repression as the course of action had been taken, and therefore there had to come a point when we simply stood up against that. We had on many occasions put forward our views to Westminster, but clearly, of the two roads open to them—repression or change of the system—they had chosen the road of repression. So at that point we took a stand and we withdrew from the system, and our judgment has now been confirmed and proved accurate, because it is now clear that there has been a complete withdrawal of consent to the system of government. That being so, that system of government cannot continue. That is the reality. We want peace in Northern Ireland, we want justice, we want stability. That can only come about now by Westminster realising the realities of the situation. If they continue to try and bury people into the ground they simply cannot succeed.

You and your party always believed that you could not have a united Ireland without a united Northern Ireland. Do you still believe that?

Yes, I believe that the divisions

in this country, as I've said so often, are a division between people and between two groups of different outlooks, and therefore the preferable way to unite this country is by agreement and consent. I believe that there is nobody who would really dispute this, and I would believe that a majority of people in Northern Ireland consenting to a united Ireland would be, in fact, the best way. Otherwise we might have the situation we have in Northern Ireland today in reverse within a united Ireland. At the present time in the situation that is developing, of course, the longer that Westminster waits to intervene and the more suffering that they put people through, the higher the people's price for a settlement goes, and that is one of the factors in this situation which I think we're closing our eyes to.

Do you see anyone you can talk to on the Unionist side or in authority in Northern Ireland?

At the present time, we're not talking to anyone on the Unionist side, because as far as we are concerned there is no government there. There is a Unionist-led administration there at the present time. We believe that the only people we can now talk to are the people who have the power to take decisions, and when they call us to talk we will go to talk, provided, of course, that they abandon their present policy of repression.

What about the I.R.A.? It has been suggested that to regain the political initiative you and your colleagues were forced to take a more radical course of action than you would have wished. Do you think you have captured the initiative from the men of violence, and if you think you have, can you hold it?

This point about us being forced is one that I have heard made, but when we are in positions of political leadership we've got to make political judgments in keeping with the political situation as we find it. Now I would make absolutely no apology to anyone for the policies that we have pursued during the last two years. In fact, without us and without our policies, it's my view that there would have been very little credibility in world eyes for our position within Northern Ireland. To put it even more briefly, had people gone to the streets of Derry in '68 with guns blazing, they would never have got to the top of Duke street and they would have

won no world support. I believe that our approach is the approach that has won respect and support and has made people realise that the Northern Ireland problem is not just the I.R.A. but is a serious community and political problem. And having throughout the last two years acted with the utmost responsibility and on many times urged restraint and many times told people, for example in Civil Rights groups, "We're opposed to your march," and made ourselves politically unpopular, I think that that strengthens us now at the point where the British Government took the decision against us. Once they took the decision of repression against us, we had no alternative other than to do as we did, and we were quite right to do it.

Remembering the evocative and emotional phrases of the first days of the Civil Rights movement, "One man one vote, one man one house, one man one job," what would be the phrases now for a refurbished and revitalised Civil Rights movement?

The obvious and immediate phrase is "End internment and oppression." And that very demand itself, of course, means another approach to the Northern problem, and there is only one other approach, and that is the suspension of Stormont.

Do you advocate the suspension of Stormont as opposed to the abolition of it?

We advocate the abolition of Stormont as it is at present constituted, and there's absolutely no doubt about that.

When you look in broad terms at the last two or three years, do you really think anything has changed?

One very definite thing has changed, and that is that I don't think there is anybody anywhere in the world now who doesn't believe that there is a serious problem in Northern Ireland to be faced. Two years ago, that was not so. It's so today, and I think that the problem has to be solved this time.

How do you look at Mr. Brian Faulkner as Prime Minister?

I don't look on him as Prime Minister for a start. I look at him as the leader of the Unionist Party, or in other words as leader of the political wing of the Orange Order. He speaks on behalf of the Unionist Party, and that is a voice which must be heard in the working out

of the ultimate solution to this problem.

What would you like to see at the present moment?

A removal of the 1920 Act as the basis of government here, and I think we would find a commission running Northern Ireland for a limited period, a desirable thing while a permanent solution was worked out. There's a point I want to make here about talks. People keep talking about tripartite talks. We are completely opposed to tripartite talks, and the people who make these suggestions are not even thinking deeply about the problem. There should either be two groups at the talks, either London and Dublin, or four groups, London, Dublin, the Unionists and ourselves, because Brian Faulkner is not a sovereign Prime Minister, and he doesn't have a sovereign Government. Technically and Constitutionally, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland is Edward Heath, who is Prime Minister of the United Kingdom. Mr. Faulkner is the head of a local administration in that Jack Lynch is a sovereign Prime Minister. If Northern Ireland is to be involved in discussions, then both sides in Northern Ireland must be involved.

What do you think is going to happen?

What I hope is going to happen is that Westminster will quickly realise its mistakes, cut its losses, cut its repressive policy, suspend the 1920 Act and call for Constitutional discussions.

What about a Protestant backlash?

The threat of a Protestant Right-wing backlash has hung over Ireland since 1912 — in fact it created this State. It's the threat that has held Northern Ireland in the grip of injustice and opposed Civil Rights and created the provisional I.R.A. as a reaction to it. It has opposed every single reform with the same threats. It has opposed two Prime Ministers and brought them down. It is opposing a third now, and it is opposing the British Government. And it is a threat that moderate Unionists use themselves when talking to the British Government. They say: "Unless you preserve us, look what you're going to get." That threat has to be faced before there can be any solution to our problem, and we'll see whether the Orange card is an ace or a deuce, and I believe it's a deuce.

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