

On the IRA: Belfast Brigade Area

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Introduction

In his discussion article, "Fascism and the Ulster State" which appeared in the *Irish Communist*, November 1970, Mick Lynch, says that the Irish Republican Army (IRA) in Ulster, more particularly in Belfast, were a militant anti-Protestant force; a Roman Catholic sectarian militia. He comes to this conclusion chiefly because of what he considers the role of the IRA to have been in the Belfast Pogroms in the early 1920s and in 1935. He claims they carried out a campaign of terrorism against the Protestant population and as a consequence provoked Protestant militias to violence. He also says of the 1935 Pogrom that the IRA actually launched armed attacks on Orange parades, *provoking as it was intended to* "an attempted pogrom from the Orange side". These allegations, already militant Protestant mythology, are dealt with in the following discussion article. Also dealt with is the allegation that the Ulster IRA was led from 1939 onwards, by an extreme pro-Nazi section under Sean McCaughey. There is much more in his article that I would like to discuss at a future date, particularly his "considerable concessions" made to the Catholic community.

The present article also answers a request from the Belfast Branch that the Cork Branch submit to the organisation details of the involvement of militant Protestants. The article will be rewritten suitable for publication in the *Irish Communist* subject to the acceptance of suggestions and criticisms from comrades.

Article by Jim Lane Cork Branch of the ICO December 1970

This article was refused publication in the *Irish Communist*, organ of the Irish Communist Organisation (now the BICO) because they considered it was promoting Catholic Nationalism. It is now being reprinted in response to a number of enquires we have had from people who have heard of the article, but have been unable to procure a copy. As a good quality copy could not be reproduced from the original duplicated stencil copy, we have decided to reset and print this unabridged edition in a superior format.

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On the IRA -- Belfast Brigade Area

The pogroms of the early 1920s in Belfast were an unprovoked attack on the Catholic community by Protestant militants at the behest of the Orange bourgeoisie. The existence of an armed body, the IRA, could in no way be seen as justification for armed attacks on Catholic areas of the city, no more than the repressive measures taken by the State against Catholics had justification. The IRA was a small grouping in the 6 Counties, poorly armed and infinitesimal in strength compared to the forces at the disposal of the State. As such it could easily have been contained without recourse to armed attacks on the Catholic community. Repressive measures in the form of discrimination in jobs, housing and elections, were considered necessary by Mick Lynch, in his discussion article "Fascism and the Ulster State", because of the need to protect the interests of the Orange bourgeoisie from attacks by the Southern bourgeoisie. Isn't it about time we got some proof of these attacks? What attacks did Griffith, Blythe, O'Higgins or Cosgrove launch or for that matter DeValera, beyond his 1937 Constitution which was only a "paper tiger" and was better known to be so by the Orange bourgeoisie the following year when he signed the 1938 Anglo Irish Trade Agreement with all its secret provisions.

It would be a great mistake to see the pogroms and repressive measures used against Catholics purely in the context of the Catholic/Protestant national conflict and to lightly dismiss the Capital/Labour struggle. It is very true as Mick Lynch says, that the Orange bourgeoisie never faced any substantial political threat from the working class. That of course is not to say that the conditions didn't exist in the industrial North East that would give rise to such a threat. There is good reason to believe that in the early 1920s such conditions did exist, but were completely submerged in the Catholic/Protestant conflict. In that sense the conflict objectively served bourgeois interests and eradicated the need for fascism. This would substantiate the view that the pogroms were bourgeois inspired, as only they stood to gain.

Labour and the 1920 Pogroms

Following the Great War, Britain as well as Ireland was in a state of unrest. Slump and unemployment accompanied by riots, mutinies and strikes were the order of the day. The events in Russia in 1917 and general unrest in Europe, left a deep impression on the working class throughout Britain. Over on the Clyde and in Glasgow, a shipbuilding centre like Belfast, working class militancy was highest of all. With the similarity of interests between Belfast and Glasgow it was only to be expected that the workers on Queen's Island and elsewhere in the North East, would become as class conscious as their comrades on the Clyde. When Willie Gallacher visited Belfast in 1919 he addressed one of the greatest hostings of united workers seen in that city for many a day. In 1919, the men of the Clyde had reason to call the Belfast shipyard workers 'brothers', for the men of Belfast were the only shipyard workers to come out on strike in sympathy with a strike on the Clyde. In those days, none but a backward bourgeoisie could but see that labour was on the advance. The fact that later, Social Democratic Labour sold out the workers, is beside the point. The message that came from industrial Britain was not lost on the Orange bourgeoisie who were in the process of establishing their own parliament statelet.

James Craig in the British House of Commons on the 28 March 1920, in a projection on what he considered to be the alignment in a future 6 Counties parliament said, "In a 6 County parliament with 52 members the Unionist majority would be about 10" - that is approximately 31 to 21 seats. Now, when it comes to counting Catholic and Protestant heads, Craig and Co. knew full well that the Protestant majority was unassailable. Later years showed their seat majority over all others to be approximately 28: that is, Unionists 40 to 12 others. But when Craig forecast a Unionist majority of only 10, he was allowing for Protestant working class 'defection' to Labour. Speaking in the British House of Commons on November 20, shortly before the passing of the Partition Act setting up the 6 County State, Sir Edward Carson said,

When they come to work the Parliament in these industrial districts the elections will turn probably on labour questions, probably on a Labour Government, it may not be the first Labour Government there will be in the United Kingdom, because they (the workers) have a preponderance of voting power and it may be you will elect the Parliament entirely on Labour questions.

Belfast and its environs as Carson knew well had thousands of workers "with a great preponderance of voting power" and it could quite well be that they would do as industrial areas in Britain were doing - "turn on labour questions". If the workers on Clyde could begin to throw off their shackles, so too could their brothers on Queen's Island. Carson could muse that Northern Labour would support the constitutional position of the 6 County Government, but then it was Tory dominance that Carson and Craig had in mind, and again could Labour be trusted on the constitutional issue.

When trouble broke out in Belfast in the previous July between Catholic and Protestant, the Ulster bourgeoisie must have recognised, planned, and welcomed the conflict as a major factor that would go a long way towards destroying working class unity and help further unify Protestant workers and bosses, behind the symbol of Protestant 'nationalism' - the Unionist Party. Many say that Carson himself instigated the riots with inflammatory harangue delivered at Finaghy on July 12, but it is more likely that what appeared to be an organised writing of letters to the *Belfast Telegraph* was responsible. These letters advised Protestant employers to sack Catholics who would not declare loyalty to the new State. A report in the *Westminster Gazette*, 24 July 1920, would indicate that the letter writing was indeed part of a plan,

It is common knowledge in Belfast and had frequently been admitted by individual Unionists that plans were matured at least two months ago to drive all the Home Rule workers in the shipyards out of their employment.

On 26 July, Catholic workers were assailed in the shipyards and this was followed by attacks on Catholic homes in Belfast, Lisburn, Newtownards, Bangor and Derry. Orange workers were requested as proof of their determination, to display their firearms in the shipyards. Thus began a shameful episode in Ulster history.

The events of the following months prior to the General Election for the Northern Parliament (24 May 1921) solidified both camps into Protestant 'nationalist' and Catholic 'nationalist' supporting their respective bourgeoisie to the deference of labour. In the South renegade labour leaders had already deferred to the Republicans and decided that "labour must wait". In the elections to the 16 seats in Belfast, Labour could not even

win a seat. Their election campaign met vicious opposition from Protestant workers from the shipyards, who went as far as to storm and capture Ulster Hall, when three Labour candidates, Baird, Midgley, and Hanna had a meeting arranged on 17 May. Having done that they sent the following telegram to Sir James Craig,

Mass meeting of loyal shipyard workers who have captured Ulster Hall from the Bolsheviks, Baird, Midgley and Hanna, request that you address them for a few minutes tonight.

Sir James seemed pleased with this suppression of democratic rights when he replied with a telegram addressed to "My shipyard friends in Ulster Hall" regretting that he could not come because of a previous engagement, but telling them that "am with you in spirit, know they will do their part. I will do mine. Well done big and wee yards".

When the election was over and lost for Labour, their spokesman finally got a chance to speak at the vote of thanks to the Election Returning Agent. Midgley declared it was the first opportunity he had of speaking in public since the election began and protested against the 'defenders' of civil and religious liberties. Baird also gave testimony of not being allowed free speech and of being hunted and shadowed by Crown Forces and of threats to wreck his home. Protestants had little to fear from Midgley, he ended up in a Unionist Cabinet in 1943.

IRA and the 1920 Pogroms

The reference by Mick Lynch in his discussion article to the IRA in Ulster as a "militant anti-Protestant force - a Roman Catholic sectarian militia" who in the pogrom period of 1920/22 carried out a campaign of terrorism against the Protestant population of Belfast by throwing bombs at trams and setting them off in working class areas is far from true. The IRA were in relation to Catholic 'nationalism' in Ulster a very small organisation who after the events of July 1920, saw its role to be one of defence of the Catholic community. In comparison to other areas of Ireland very few attacks against Crown Forces took place in the North. It may not be generally known that during the conflict in the 1920s the IRA in Belfast disciplined both its members and others in the Catholic community who sought to subvert the interests of the Catholic community by organising attacks on Protestants and using the conflict as an excuse for armed raids on banks and dwelling houses etc. The standard practice was to be tarred and feathered and dumped in some spot like Cromac Square when there were plenty of people about - to shame them. To the Protestant community the IRA were seen to be objectively "an anti-Protestant force- a Roman Catholic sectarian militia", but I will leave that for the moment and deal with it later.

It must be appreciated that in the 1920s like today in the 6 Counties, neither the State, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) or the IRA have a monopoly on the possession of guns or material for making bombs. Still it is commonplace to blame the IRA for any attack against Protestants and the UVF for attacks against Catholics, but we all know too well, how hard it is to get at the truth. My research which is open to correction shows that the bomb attacks on trams referred to by Mick Lynch began in November 1921 (16 months after the first pogrom) and took place in York Street at six o'clock in the evening when workers were returning from the shipyards. It must be seen as an attack on

Protestants, because only they were working in the shipyards at this time. Several people were slaughtered, many were seriously injured. To see this as an IRA outrage, without any proof, is to ignore the social conditions in Belfast at this time. Catholic workers all but starved, few were employed, most had lost their jobs in the shipyards because of the Catholic/Protestant conflict, men's bellies tipped their backbones and every evening, they saw Protestant workers go home in the tramcars to their families and a meal on the table. Is it any wonder that these workers should hit out at those they figured to be their enemies. We may condemn them and the IRA may have thought it necessary to discipline them when they robbed and plundered, but let us understand them as we would those who deprived them of their jobs. The polarisation of the Protestant masses behind their bourgeoisie called for an awful price, it was paid for by Catholic and Protestant lives.

Pogrom in West Cork

Whilst exonerating Republicans of the charge of fomenting the pogroms in Belfast, it is still necessary to explode the myth that exists in the Free State that Orangemen alone are the only ones capable of such cruelty to their fellowman. In April 1922, at the time of the Truce, a pogrom every bit as vicious as any one in Belfast, took place in West Cork. Following the shooting dead of an IRA officer by a Protestant, armed men visited Protestant homes in the districts surrounding Bandon and on one day alone nine Protestants were shot dead. A young boy of 18 years was shot in his home in Clonakilty, a married man with a young family was shot in Dunmanway, as well as two old men in their 70s and 80s. Elsewhere, in Ballineen, Enniskeane, and Castletown-Kenneigh the story was similar, a knock at the door at dead of night and the men of the house were taken out and shot before their families. By the weekend Protestants poured out of West Cork, taking the Rosslare boat to Britain. The week was finished off with the shooting of an old Protestant, aged over 70 years and crippled with arthritis. The important difference between this pogrom and the ones in Belfast was in the reaction of the Catholic bourgeoisie who roundly condemned it and took all necessary steps to protect the Protestant minority, and the IRA leader Tom Hales, issued a statement offering protection to all Protestants and a threat of capital punishment to offenders. It is also significant that the Belfast Executive of Sinn Fein issued a statement in which they said,

That we accord our horror at this brutal assault of our Protestant fellow-countrymen in Cork and hope the efforts of Dail Eireann to bring the murderers to justice will be successful.

The determination and success of the Catholic bourgeoisie in preventing a reoccurrence of the West Cork pogrom, came about because there was no objective reason for the persecution of Protestants in the South. In the North it was objectively in the interests of the Protestant bourgeoisie that the sectarian conflict should continue, hence their faint hearted attempts to stop the pogroms. When one considers the role of the British Army and its relative success in preventing sectarian conflict in the North today, and remember that in 1921 the same army was withdrawn to barracks in the North and the job of dealing with sectarian conflict left to the RUC and Specials, the object of the Protestant bourgeoisie at that period becomes very clear.

Labour unrest in early 1930s

In his treatment of the 1932-35 period in Belfast, Mick Lynch leaves an unclear picture and the connotations are that the IRA were the principal culprits in shattering whatever working class unity existed. The following facts dealing with this period will give the reader a clearer perspective and will I believe demonstrate that the IRA's role was indeed a minor one. The demonstrations of 1932 which brought together Catholic and Protestant workers in Belfast, were a direct result of appalling conditions prevailing in that city at the time and which affected both communities. World capitalism was in crisis since 1929 and Belfast being a highly industrialised city was particularly badly hit. Unemployment in the 6 Counties was at that time 27.2% compared with 21.9% in Britain.

On Monday 3 October, 10,000 unemployed workers marched and were addressed by Jack Beattie (Lab) MP, Sean Murray (Revolutionary Workers Group), Tom Geehan (Outdoor Relief Workers Committee), Alderman Pierce (Independent Unionist) and Harry Diamond (Nationalist). The following day thousands were to march on the Belfast Workhouse and returning crowds wrecked business premises in Sandy Row and Falls area. At this stage efforts were made to divide the workers when Craigavon said, "If the mischief makers who had come into Belfast had any design by the trouble they had created towards obtaining a Republic, they were doomed to disappointment". Continuing he said, "he was not a man to be intimidated". Though the Ulster Protestant Association members were supporting the struggle and these included many B-Specials, they like the IRA did not command the full support of their militant 'nationalists'. Within days of Craigavon's talk of a Republic, inscriptions like "Sinn Feiners are here" appeared in several parts of the Protestant Shankill Road district. Interviewed by the press a member of the Outdoor Relief Workers Committee, said that he did not think the attempts would have much effect. "The men", he said, "knew it was a worker's fight and they did not intend to be influenced by any differences which would divide them and destroy the solidarity so necessary in this fight for better conditions".

During the first two weeks of October 1932, not even the Craigavons with their 'Republic' scare, extreme Protestant 'nationalists' with their vicious wall slogans, or the killing of workers by the RUC could defeat the united Protestant and Catholic workers. When they had won the terms demanded, the chairman of the Unemployed Committee remarked that,

The last two weeks would be regarded as two of the most glorious in the history of the working-class in Belfast. First they saw the Protestant and Catholic workers marching together and on Tuesday they saw them fighting together.

Later in the month, George Gilmore, speaking to a large crowd at a republican commemoration in Newmarket, Co.Cork, drew loud applause when he said of the struggle,

The revolt was the most important political event that occurred in Belfast, it was more important than the overthrow of the Cosgrove Government because it brought the two parties who were always fighting in Belfast together - the IRA and the Belfast Specials.

A new epoch was marked in January 1933 with the placing in power of Hitler in

Germany, to be shortly followed by the suppression of working class organisations in that country. In Ireland, the rantings of the Ulster Protestant League, who that year indicated support for Nazi Germany and the donning of the blue shirt by the Army Comrades Association in the South, was a signal for the workers to organise. In June of that year, the Revolutionary Workers Groups of Belfast, Derry and Coleraine joined with their comrades from Dublin, Cork and elsewhere in the Free State, to form the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI). Earlier in the year, despite efforts by Craigavon and the Paisleyites of the period - the UPL, Catholic and Protestant workers had fought a two month rail strike against wage cuts. The strike was accompanied by a wave of sabotage organised by Catholic and Protestant militants, against railroad property. A constable of the RUC named, Ryan, a Catholic from Co. Tipperary was shot dead in one incident.

Shortly following the formation of the CPI its members began to suffer the effects of the Special Powers Act which had been made permanent that year. Houses were visited and ransacked for communist literature, many were to lose their employment after the 'friendly call' from the political police to the boss, not that many had jobs. In Armagh as a result of a report in the local Unionist press that a Communist Council had been set up in the city, the RUC raided houses at dead of night searching for communist literature. As could be expected, some local Labour people were also raided and as a result the local secretary, Councillor C. McKee made a complaint to the Urban District Council on 2 October 1933.

To mark the anniversary of the shooting of the Belfast workers on the previous October, the Irish Unemployed Workers' Movement organised a march on Belfast for early October. Marchers were to come to Belfast from Derry, as well as a contingent from Dublin. The Derry members arrived, but the Dublin marchers were arrested in Newry near the Border, and sent to the Free State. The Belfast march was banned and the unemployed leader, Tom Geehan, took the wise decision of not at that time challenging the military and police who stood at the ready. This decision demonstrated the determination of the advanced sections of the working class not to be drawn into sectarian fighting. A few days beforehand, a young RUC man, a native of Westmeath was killed when armed men tried to gain entry to a house that was being guarded by police. As Geehan said, "Even though the incident is unconnected with our struggle, to hold a parade in the prevailing atmosphere, could be the cause of starting trouble in certain quarters of the city". The fact that a Catholic publican named O'Boyle was killed by Protestant militants within hours of his decision not to confront the military and police, further demonstrates his and his committee's wise decision. On Sunday 15 October, Harry Pollitt, secretary of the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB), who had come over for a party meeting, was arrested and deported. Sean Murray, secretary of the CPI was arrested in the meeting hall and sent on the train back to Dublin. It is of interest to know that at this period Catholic nationalist, Joe Devlin, was also leading the unemployed - on a pilgrimage to Rome. Towards the end of the year, the IRA contested several seats in the General Election and received the public support of the communists.

In 1934, following the withdrawal of the left wing element in the IRA from the organisation, an anti-imperialist organisation Republican Congress came into being. Its support in Belfast can be measured by the fact that three bus loads of workers from the Shankill Road area alone attended at the Wolfe Tone commemoration in Bodenstown,

Co. Kildare in June of that year. They marched with the Republican Congress contingent under banners inscribed 'Break the connection with Capitalism' and significantly 'United Irishmen of 1934'. It was regrettable that some of the IRA men attacked the marchers, seized and tore the banners. However, this disruptive element were fortunately in the minority in the IRA and many of the rank and file members continued to support their comrades in the anti-imperialist Republican Congress. The Communist International was not unaware of the potential of the IRA and in an issue of its journal, *Imprecorr*, it could say,

Certain good mass work is done by the comrades in the IRA, in the pits, in the unemployed movement. The party must make a determined appeal to the revolutionary rank and file republicans in the Republican Army to join with the League against Fascism in the united front: the glorious fighting of the IRA must be utilised to destroy Fascism ...

Several years later, the Irish section of the International Brigade was to draw the majority of its membership from the Republican Army.

1935 Pogroms

With unemployment at 24.8% in the Six Counties and the working class solidarity on the increase it was not the IRA as Mick Lynch alleges that shattered what remained of Catholic/Protestant working class unity, but the Paisleyites of the period, the Ulster Protestant League. In fact, the Communist Party was making such an impression in Belfast in 1935 that it replaced the IRA as the main target for attack from militant Protestants. May Day in Belfast saw hundreds of workers walking behind communist banners which called for an end to the infamous Special Powers Act. As it happened the 6 May was King George's Jubilee and it was used by militant Protestants as an excuse to launch attacks on Catholics who didn't show any enthusiasm for the celebrations. In typical Paisleyite style, Crawford, the chairman of the UPL staged a demonstration in Derry, bringing a train load of supporters from Belfast. Following inflammatory speeches minor skirmishes broke out between Catholics and Protestants. Over in County Tyrone a Catholic priest was beaten up when he removed decorations from his church, put there by local Protestants. Trouble in Belfast mainly took the form of attacks on Catholic girl workers on their way to work at Gallaghers. On Friday 10 May after bombs were thrown in Vere Street and a Catholic shot, curfew was declared in Belfast.

Workers meetings at that period were held near the Customs House and on a Sunday a Labour meeting (it may have been a communist meeting) was attacked by a Protestant mob of over 300, who were armed with staves and razors. Another workers meeting in Library Street was interfered with, but police intervened. The working class had indeed cause to be organising and demonstrating. J.M. Andrews, Minister of Labour in the 6 Counties House of Commons on 30 May 1935, gave them plenty to worry about when after stating that the population was increasing at the rate of 8,000 a year, he urged *the Imperial Government to develop sparsely inhabited areas of the Empire to meet the ever increasing supply.*

No doubt the communists who called a meeting for the Customs House on the Sunday following this statement by the Minister for Labour had much to say on this matter. However, as shots had been fired into a Catholic area on the previous night and the Custom House being ringed by a massive force of police, the meeting was called off.

That week the National Council for Civil Liberties, composed of people like Aneurin Bevin, Attle, Foot, Lansbury and Pritt, visited Belfast. Following a UPL meeting on Wednesday, many of those who had attended went and attacked the Independent Labour Party premises as well as going on a rampage of window breaking in Catholic areas. The following Sunday, a 15-year-old orphan girl was shot by jeering Protestants while on her way back from Mass. In fact that weekend was marked by plenty of shooting in York Street and New Dock Street.

Attacks on Catholic workers got so bad in York Street area that Northern Irish Labour Party (NILP) and the Belfast Trades' Council sent a deputation to the Minister for Home Affairs seeking greater protection for the workers. Misreporting in the Unionist Press which suggested that the delegation inferred that the troublemakers came from the Free State, brought a denial from the delegation who said they came from towns and areas on the outskirts of Belfast.

On Wednesday 19th a delegation representing the UPL, Ulster Protestant Society, East Belfast Protestant Association and the Ulster Protestant Reformers Club saw the Minister for Home Affairs, Sir Dawson Bates. Mr Thompson who introduced the delegation said that the members represented all the Protestant societies in Belfast, and they urged the government to take definite steps with a view to *banning the activities of the Communist Party in Northern Ireland*. Other representatives present endorsed these remarks and the minister told them he was bound by law, but would give their suggestions careful consideration. As these organisations contained the most militant of Protestants and most likely the backbone of the Special Constabulary, we can now better understand the following extract from George Gilmore's book, *Republican Congress* (page 19).

When Sir Oswald Mosely the leader of fascism in England visited Belfast with the object of extending his organisation to the Six Counties, Lord Craigavon assured him that it was unnecessary... that Northern Ireland had already, in its armed Special Constabulary a fascist force in being.

It is important to note at this stage that the traditional 'bogeymen', the IRA, had been replaced by the CPI.

Securian trouble broke out again early in July when Orangemen returning from the Battle of the Somme anniversary, invaded a Catholic area. One area which repelled an attack had shots fired from it at the attackers when they returned a second time from another direction. Marchers going to Clifton Street Orange Hall were fired on in another incident and three were injured. A nationalist procession had its Wolfe Tone banner attacked and destroyed, also the Catholic accordion band of St. Marys' was attacked in Union Street. Parades had been banned in June, but was immediately defied when the Lord Carson Flute Band paraded in York Street, (centre of the trouble area) despite a police warning.

The events of late July that resulted in the deaths of 12 people and over 50 injured, was sparked off when shots were fired in the direction of an Orange parade in York Street. There is no evidence to suggest that it was a *planned IRA attack*, in fact a court case that followed the incident, suggests from the evidence, that the incident was unplanned and an act of individual militant Catholics. There is doubt as to whether the

RUC over reacted, when they went to the Lancaster Street area where fighting had also broken out. In this incident they separated the Catholics from the attacking Protestants by placing armoured cars across the street and they turned their Lewis machine guns and rifles on the defenders of Lancaster Street killing one woman and seriously injuring many more. Curfew was declared and, after five deaths, the Borderers Regiment of the British Army were called in to restore order. However, the introduction of the British Army was objected to by the UPL who called for their withdrawal and their replacement by the B. Specials, who they said had previously restored order in 1921, when they replaced the military. The day following their call, the B. Specials were in on the job, but the British Army also remained. At the inquest on the dead the Coroner of Belfast, Mr T. Alexander (a Protestant) said over the dead bodies,

The people who commit these riots are easily led and influenced. They are influenced almost entirely by the public speeches of men in high and responsible positions. There would be less fighting if there were less public speechmaking by so called leaders of public opinion.

Needless to say the IRA leaders filled no high or responsible positions in the 6 Counties nor did the comrades of the Communist Party. But people in high positions like the Minister for Labour, Mr Andrews, with his talk of resettlement of unemployed labour in darkest Africa, India or some other part of the British Empire, would indeed influence people to riot. The distain for the pogromists exhibited by the Ulster bourgeoisie today, after they having served their interests on countless occasions in the past, is best described in the words of Patrick Riddell, a 6 County civil servant since 1922,

The Protestant mobs in certain notoriously backward districts provoked to fury, behaved dreadfully, attacking and killing innocent Roman Catholics. The reprisals by Roman Catholics from their backward districts, were similarly dreadful. Every city has its guttersnipes ...
(*Fire over Ulster*, page 50.)

In the closing months of 1935 there were several further incidents of a sectarian nature, a Catholic was killed in September, a Unionist MP injured when shot at, bombs thrown into the Catholic side of barricades in North Street, and a republican election meeting was attacked by gunmen from a car which escaped into the Shankill area after injuring two people who were attending the meeting. Tom Geehan who led the workers struggle in 1932 and was only recently released from prison, declared his intention of standing as a People's candidate in North Belfast in the Westminster Elections. He got qualified support from the CPI, but it appears that he didn't go forward for election because of lack of funds.

During this period also, the leadership of the Northern IRA was arrested as a result of information received from an informer, all received sentences of several years. Included in this group was Sean McCool who was at that time probably the senior officer in the Northern area and who would have had definite knowledge of any *organised attacks*, on Orange parades. McCool's record does not suggest that he was the type of man who would countenance sectarianism. Always with the 'left', McCool was an early supporter of left-wing politics in the IRA. As early as the late 1920s he spent sometime in the USSR (at the invitation of the Soviet Government) regaining his health. One of the

founders of Saor Eire, it was significant that he should second the resolution sending fraternal greetings to the Soviet Union from the Congress on 26/7 September 1931 at the Iona Hall, Dublin. A member of the Friends of Soviet Russia, which incidentally had a branch in Belfast, he was well identified with those communists and republicans who sought working class unity of Catholics and Protestants in Belfast. In 1933, when the Revolutionary Workers' College was formed in Eccles Street, he was identified again with left-republicans and was in fact on an organising committee. Later when he stood for election in the North, he was supported by the communists of Derry and Coleraine who issued an official declaration of support on the eve of the election. I can hardly see this man plotting attacks on Protestant parades or associating with what Mick Lynch calls a 'militant anti-Protestant force'. (As I write an epidemic of armed robberies have been taking place in Belfast, before anyone should jump to conclusions as to who is responsible it would be well to bear in mind that in late 1935, two RUC constables appeared before the courts on separate charges of armed robbery)

Protestants and the 1937 Free State Constitution

Early 1936 saw the end of the newspaper *Republican Congress* and later in the year the organisation itself was all but extinct. In 1937, during the period when the intended DeValera constitution was being discussed, the following comments extracted from *An Phoblacht* and relating to Protestants are of interest.

This constitution is the final triumph of the Griffith School against the Tone, Lalor, Mitchell, Pearse, Connolly and Mellow's teaching. It is as the watch-dog of private property clauses that the Roman Catholic Bishops in the South are to get a privileged political situation, just as it is as whipper-up for the Empire that church leaders are privileged in the North. Craigavon's Protestant State for a Protestant people. De Valera's Catholic State for a Catholic people. To both these we must raise Tone's slogan, To sink the terms Catholic and Protestant in the common name of Irishman.

(Peadar O'Donnell, *An Phoblacht*, 22 May 1937)

Is this constitution Tone's definition of Freedom? 'We know of no other definition', Pearse wrote, 'except Tones'. Does this constitution, 'break the connection with England'? Does it 'substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denomination of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter'? As he wrote in his pamphlet to the Dissenters, 'they and the Catholics had but one common interest and one common enemy' Now why a privileged position for one Church, North or South?

(Tadgh Lynch, *An Phoblacht*, 5 June 1937)

Religious liberty demands not the setting up of a Protestant State for a Protestant people nor a Catholic State for a Catholic people, but a Sovereign State for a sovereign people - the Irish Republic for the Irish People

(*An Phoblacht*, 5 June 1937)

The entire document outrages every Republican tradition; degrading woman to the level of the middle ages; canonising the great landlord and industrial class described by Lalor as 'Britain's faithful garrison in Ireland'; establishing the *Church of Rome as the state church - a barrier to a United Ireland as formidable as British bayonets*; Ireland is divided into two British provinces both ruled by a native aristocracy through the medium of a "Protestant" and "Catholic" Parliament respectively.

(*An Phoblacht*, 26 June 1937)

Ulster IRA and its Nazis

After splits and resignations in the IRA in 1938, the militarist group led by Sean Russell took control of the IRA. Russell who had fought in the GPO in 1916, had never identified with any particular political tendencies in the IRA, his job was in munitions and his capabilities stopped at that point. On Bloody Sunday, 21 November, 1920, 13 of the 18 executions of English intelligence officers was carried out by the 2nd Battalion of the Dublin IRA, under Russell's command. Shortly after that he became Director of Munitions for the IRA and no doubt was associated later with the bombing campaign of the early 1920s in England, which was aborted (following several fires in Liverpool) when nearly all the IRA network in England were arrested. He was involved in the burning of the Customs House in Dublin, prison escapes, a hunger strike (41 days) and missions abroad for arms. One such mission was to the USSR in 1926, when he actually met Stalin.

The attitude of George Gilmore (in many ways representative of left republicanism) at this period is of interest when one considers subsequent events. Writing in *Easter Week*, 16 April 1938, he urged the IRA to take no action which would benefit Germany as a militant campaign against England would. He said that the impending war would offer an excellent opportunity for Ireland to leave the Empire and declare herself a Republic. 'England' he argued, 'would be in no position to stop this. But having declared their complete independence, Ireland should line up our Republic with the democratic powers against fascism...when we think of the effects it could have on the 6 Counties problem, it opens up possibilities that are dazzling'

Mick Lynch tells us that the IRA was dominated by a pro-Nazi clique from 1939 onwards, also that at this time Ulster Republicans were dominated by an extreme pro-Nazi section led by Sean McCaughey. Because the question of the pro-Nazi clique is to be dealt with by the ICO shortly, I will leave that point, but would like in the meantime to make comment on the McCaughey 'clique' mentioned by Mick Lynch. For a start he is incorrect on his dates, McCaughey was serving a 6 month sentence in the Free State in late 1939 and did not get back to Belfast until late December. As contacts with the German agents were at their peak in mid to late 1939, McCaughey couldn't have been involved as he was in prison. During 1940 until he went to Dublin in early 1941 in connection with the Stephen Hayes affair, he operated independently of GHQ in Dublin. It is not enough to say McCaughey led a pro-Nazi clique in Belfast, unless we have some proof. What we do know about the Belfast IRA in 1940 is that several battalion officers were court-martialled in the Autumn for using Fascist techniques, when disciplining their volunteers. The court-martials were initiated by Jimmy Steele (who until his death was in the Provisionals and was a bitter anti-communist) and resulted in the officers being reduced to the ranks. At this time McCaughey as Northern Command O.C. could have easily prevented these court-martials if he was as Mick Lynch alleges, ' the leader of a pro-Nazi clique'. Another Northern IRA leader at this period was Eoin McNamee, regarded as a left-republican, having been involved in the Republican Congress in 1936 in London, he also forced the court-martials.

Following McCaughey's move to Dublin in early 1941 where he became IRA Adj.Gen., McCool, recently released from prison, with McNamee, took control of the

Northern Command. Operating under the direct control of the Northern Command at this period was a Special Operations Group (SOG) which was composed almost entirely of Protestants. Recruited from Denis Ireland's Irish Union Society, they were in the main active trade unionists and regarded as socialists. One of the more prominent was John Graham who was IRA Intelligence Officer, director of publicity, and editor of the *Republican News*.

When a recurrence of Fascist techniques took place during the McCool - McNamee leadership, the SOG was mobilised armed and prepared to deal severely with offenders. Under threat of being shot, the OC of the offending battalion concerned capitulated. Graham was later to be arrested and jailed in September 1942, after a gunfight in the *Republican News* office. Mick Lynch mentions the extreme Roman Catholicism of republican publications in Ulster in the 1920's, it would be indeed interesting to see some editions of the *Republican News*, edited by the Protestant Graham in the early 1940s. The existence of an IRA grouping almost entirely composed of Protestants makes the charge against the IRA of being 'a militant anti-Protestant force; a Roman Catholic sectarian militia', sound almost ridiculous.

The Republican Mind

As I said earlier the IRA were seen to be a sectarian and anti-Protestant force by the Protestant masses. However, though objectively so to the Protestants, subjectively they were all-embracing to all sections of the community. Appeals for unity to the Protestant masses were repeatedly made, and rejected, this the republican mind could never understand. Their most common explanation was that the Protestant masses were being duped by Britain. To the republican, expulsion of the British invader would solve everything. Break the connection with England the cause of all our ills, was Tone's dictum and though Tone is dead nearly 200 years and the country has experienced much change since then, this is still republican dogma. For an insight into the republican mind on the 6 Counties I consider the following letter well worth reading in full. It was written by the secretary of Sinn Fein, Michael Traynor, in January, 1954. Traynor is a Belfastman and was another one of the Ulster IRA leaders during the pogrom period of 1935. He lined up with the pro-German element in the Curragh during the 1940s, went on hunger strike that nearly caused him death (two others died on it) and in the early 1960s was moved out of the Republican Movement by the Goulding/MacGiolla group.

The Real Ulster Protestant

The *Sunday Independent* quotes Dr. Farren, Bishop of Derry, as stating that sinister influences are at work in the North of Ireland, forcing decisions on the Stormont Government. The *Sunday Independent* names the Orange Order as the sinister influence and indicts both the Stormont and Westminster Governments for their failure to honour their own declarations and laws (ie. The Government of Ireland Act, 1920)

What proof has the *Sunday Independent* that the sinister influence referred to by Dr. Farren is the Orange Order? The Orange Order is for the most part of ordinary working class people, who are (unfortunately) roused unthinkingly on occasions by their leaders to acts of bigotry and violence. It is surely wrong to indict a whole section of people who have been misled by leaders who seek only self-advancement.

The Ulster Protestant is a decent God-fearing man. Unfortunately the historical background in his

life in Ulster makes him fear the Ulster Catholic taking revenge for confiscations and persecutions that followed the Scotch Plantation in the early 17th century. This fear has been used by all the place hunters. A few come to mind - Chichester, Castlereagh, Carson, Craig. Except for a brief period in the late 18th century the terms Catholic-Irish; Planter- Protestant were synonymous. For years after the Plantation of Ulster the dispossessed Irish made forays from mountains and bogs into their confiscated pasture lands and killed- carried off what booty they could ; in the same way as the Irish made forays into the Pale around Dublin for centuries. Naturally the Protestant Planters banded together to protect themselves from these raids and eventually the Orange Order came into existence. *It was purely a Protestant protection society which had of necessity to continually seek the aid in arms and laws of the British Government to maintain its existence. The Ulster Protestant therefore had to identify himself completely with Britain if he wanted to live.* It was a matter of self-interest as well as being in conformity with his religious beliefs. It was not at any time a question of loving England rather than Ireland. When the time came that British laws oppressed both Ulster Protestant and Ulster Catholic, Ulster Protestant rushed to arms to break the connection with England and establish a sovereign Republic. Later days (Larne gun running, 14 April 1914) saw Ulster Protestants again defying the might of the British Empire and arming themselves to defend their rights against the laws of Westminster.

The days of forays etc. are gone. Protestants and Catholics live and work amicably together (except for occasional fomented outbursts). There remains a tradition of loyalty to England and a feeling of economic dependence on the coffers and trade of the Empire, which is carefully fostered by up and coming politicians who do not scruple to resurrect past fears and memories of violence and to create new fears and acts of self-advancement. Some *Catholic politicians* masquerading as Nationalists have at times adopted the *same tactics*, thereby intensifying the fears of Ulster Protestants, that if Ireland were separated from England, Protestants would immediately become subject to a reign of terror and persecution.

Only time and experience of a Free United Ireland will prove to Ulster Protestants that their fears are unfounded and that their real interest lies in Ireland and not in England. Talk will not convince them.

The solution of the whole problem lies with England. The English Government must be forced to withdraw its troops from the North of Ireland and to cease interfering in Irish affairs. Thus the vast field of advancement which the British Empire affords to careerists will be closed to the Ulster leaders who will then naturally turn *their talents to the improvement of Ireland and their fellow Protestants in Ulster.* The sinister influences at work in Ulster are a small number of men who use the Orange Order and the fears of their fellow Protestants to make money and positions for themselves and who love neither Ulster nor England , but themselves.

The 1950s and 1960s

During the 1950s and 1960s many appeals for unity were made by Northern Republicans to Ulster Protestants, these were accompanied by attacks on the AOH (Ancient Order of Hibernians) and Catholic Nationalists . The rights of Orangemen to march were defended, Catholic nationalists were attacked as bigots when they advocated boycotting Protestant shops, Orange flags were flown symbolically by republicans and they broke with Catholic nationalist tradition of not contesting elections in Unionist strongholds. The AOH were referred to as the 'Keoghboys of the 50s - sickening sycophants with their ferocious Catholicity' and were further ridiculed as the 'Pope's Brass Band' for the playing the tune of 'Faith of Our Fathers'. During the IRA campaign of 1956-1962, no sectarian fighting occurred, the IRA as before did not foment sectarian troubles, confining their attacks to Crown Forces. The B-Specials were immune from attack for 21 months , because the IRA considered them a Protestant sectarian force. They were made a target for attack after their part in killing Sinn Feiner, James Crossan. It was also significant that during these armed attacks by the IRA in the 6 County State, militant Protestant 'nationalists' did not

repeat the pogroms of earlier years - their bourgeoisie no longer had a vested interest in such unrest.

There can be no doubt that the IRA in Belfast today has within its ranks many bigoted militant Catholics. Following the events of August 1969, many young Catholics, itching to have a go at Protestants, joined the Defence Committees and the IRA. After the split in the IRA most of these types went with the Provisionals in the hope of finding more action there. The existence of these bigots was admitted to me in private several months ago by leading members of the Northern Provisional IRA. They immediately made it clear to me that they wanted to rid their movement of these elements. However, they claim to have a problem, they say it would be easy to dismiss this element, but to do so would do untold harm to the already strained situation in Belfast. They claim that as long as these elements are members they exercise a fair deal of control over their activities, but to turn them loose would be to invite them to engage in small group activity. They say there is already enough of this type of activity. In the meantime they hope to dissuade them. I believe British Army intelligence are by now aware of the position, and would consequently wish to see the IRA continue to exist in the hope that they will do for the community what the British Army are already committed to - the prevention of sectarian troubles and riots. My experience of the Republican Movement and its present leadership most of whom I know for a number years, leads me to believe that they will in no way foment sectarian trouble, but rather, take steps to prevent it.

**Jim Lane,
Cork**

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Author: Jim Lane

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