

ganizers of the march now came with advice, offers of assistance and pro-stations of full support. They did it very well. By October 9th they had created and had begun to dominate a new organization - the Citizens Action Committee. From the beginning the watchword of the C.A.C. was "Unity".

Since it included Nationalists the preservation of "Unity" was going to mean that the C.A.C. could not attack the Nationalist Party. Since it included people with very limited



political objectives the C.A.C. was not going to be able to put forward any radical demands.

The animal brutality of the RUC in Duke St. had sparked off a wave of outrage. Thousands of hitherto apathetic Derry people suddenly became militant. From the start the C.A.C. had a ready-made mass movement behind it, - a movement which was almost exclusively Catholic. But it was not facing any mass opposition. There was no Protestant crowd on the streets to oppose the October 5th march. There was no fighting between Catholics and Protestants over that weekend.

One reason for the absence of opposition was that the movement before October 5th was relatively small. It did not therefore, seem to be an immediate threat to the status quo.

More important, it had been acutely conscious of the fact that it is not enough to preach non-Sectarianism. It had at all times tried to put forward slogans and ideas

which cut across the religious divide. As well as campaigning for the repeal of Repressive laws and an end to gerrymandering and discrimination, it demanded the appointment of a Rents Assessment Tribunal. It attacked the Corporation Sanitary Dept. for failing rigorously to enforce the laws relating to the upkeep of rented accommodation. It involved itself in the formation of Tenants Associations and helped fight Housing Trust rent-rises. And so on. All these were economic issues which could not be represented as "Catholic". By campaigning on them the movement before October 5th showed itself willing deliberately to split the whole community -- including the Catholic community -- between the haves and the have-nots, between the working class and its enemies.

Catholic slum landlords were attacked in leaflets the wording of which showed a healthy disrespect for the laws of libel.

It is not possible to say how the situation would have developed if the leadership of the movement had not, after October 5th, been taken over by those who describe themselves as "moderates". But one thing is certain: it could scarcely have become any more sectarian than it has done. Because now we do have determined mass opposition on the streets

Up to a point this was always on the cards. Political passion has never lain very deep beneath the surface in Derry. Unemployment, bad-housing and lack of democracy had built up a reservoir of resentment.

The machinations of the Unionist and Nationalist Parties had given this resentment a high sectarian content. Many Catholics have traditionally blamed "the Protestants" for their problems, and many protestants were convinced that, to survive as a group, they must "keep the Catholics down". (Since Catholic

and Protestant workers rarely meet socially there is often total ignorance of what the 'other side' really thinks. In January when the barricades were up around the Bogside members of the Labour Party and the P.D. were setting up "Radio Free Derry", We thought that we ought to address ourselves to the people of the Fountain area and explain to them that we were not against them. In order to do this we decided we should go up the Fountain, talk to the people there and find out what they thought of the situation. With some trepidation Miss Bernadette Devlin and I volunteered to do this.

We were invited into a house. Within a short time a number of neighbours had gathered into the kitchen, mostly I think out of curiosity. I gave out the usual C.R. line about wanting justice for all sections of the Community etc., and put it to them that the minority rule of Derry Corporation was indefensible. How could they justify it? A middle-aged woman told me immediately: "But if you Catholics were in control there would be no life for us here. We would have to leave our



homes and get out." It was clear that every one of them actually believed that.

It is ridiculous, I told them. They must have been brain-washed by the Unionist Party. Hadn't they listened to our speeches? Hadn't they heard us say over and over again that all we wanted was fair play and equal opportunities? Did they think we were all, every single one of us, liars and hypocrites?

But then, look at it from another point of view. Recall the mass march of November 16th. Twenty thousand people standing

on Craigavon Bridge. There were no placards, no slogans. Prior publicity was almost entirely concentrated on advertising "the right to march". It was not absolutely clear what we were marching for.

In the Diamond afterwards speaker after speaker attacked the Unionist party. Unionist political personalities were very effectively torn to shreds. Reference was made to Gerry Glover, slum landlord.

All the attack was concentrated on the political philosophy which happens to be accepted by the overwhelming majority of Protestants. No attack was made on any political philosophy accepted by any section of the Catholics. No mention was made of Frank McLaughlin, slum landlord.

Because by that time the movement, now led by the Citizens Action Committee was a mass Catholic alliance, uniting Catholics of all classes and all non-unionist political parties.

It had become impossible to criticize a Catholic on a Civil Rights platform without being denounced as a 'wrecker'. If anyone doubts that let him remember the reaction of Civil Rights leaders when I attacked a Nationalist M.P. at the Strabane demonstration.

Since that date within the Citizens Action Committee as within every Civil Rights Group in N. Ireland, Radicals have been pressing for the extension of the platform to include economic demands, to include in particular a programme for ending the housing shortage and for creating full employment. They have been arguing that unless this is done the demand for 'fair play' implies that Protestants should be less privileged than they are at present; and that, as a result, it is easy for an adept propagandist to represent the whole Civil Rights movement as anti-protestant.

The Radicals have failed. They have failed because if they insisted on putting forward such a pro-

gramme they would split the movement

Unable to get their point across, but unwilling to leave the Civil Rights movement lest they lose all influence, they have emerged simply as "militants". The absence of real public debate on the political difference within the movement has meant that it is no longer quite clear what they are being militant about. As a result of this confusion

unionist politicians have been able to adopt the line that the only difference between the 'moderates' and the 'militant' is that the moderates are anti-protestant and the militants are even more anti-protestant.

Thus we, as socialists, find ourselves in an impossible situation. Our political position is obscure. Our identity is almost submerged in a move-

Why has the "non-violent, non-sectarian" civil rights movement led to sectarian violence?

Mostly it is the Unionist Party's fault. They have kept people divided in order to keep themselves in power. They have done this by fooling Protestant workers into thinking they are somehow "superior" to Catholic workers. And they have been able to do it because they have had a few bribes to hand out - the odd house in Fountain St. and Wapping Lane you may wonder whether this has made much difference to the life of the average Protestant worker.

It is this system and this society which produced the young people who were on the streets last Saturday, Sunday, and Monday. They are NOT to be dismissed as "Hooligans."

The Citizens Action (1) Committee put forward a series of mild, moderate demands. In campaigning for them they roused the raging passions which have always lain just beneath the surface in this city.

The C.R. movement should have put forward demands which cut across the whole system and forgotten the nonsense about C.R. being "non-political".

Had that been done it might have been possible to direct the militancy of young people, rather than go on arousing it and then trying to dampen it down. In Derry you cannot turn political passions on and off like a tap.

Instead of demanding fair shares of what houses there are, we should have been demanding an end to the housing shortage. This would involve the nationalisation of the building societies, the takeover of vacant houses, etc.

Instead of demanding fair shares of what jobs there are, we should have put forward a policy for ending unemployment. Such a policy would include the creation of state industries which could only be done through the state taking over the banks and big businesses.

The problem in Derry is not that the cake is shared out unfairly. The problem is that the cake itself is not big enough to give every one a "fair share."

If we don't realize this we will never get through to people such as those who live in bad houses in the Fountain area. Because our demand for fair shares holds out no hope of improving their conditions.

The feelings of the young people who were fighting the police last Sunday must be given some sort of political underpinning. Their militancy must be given political direction. Otherwise they will, quite literally, run riot. And it will be moral cowardice for the "moderates" to disown them as they did the last time.

(Text of leaflet published on July 19th)

ment which every day become more and more openly a specifically Catholic movement.

Any attempt to put forward our own position within the movement is howled down: we are told that we are "introducing politics" etc.

(Of all the arguments used against the left, this is the most spurious. All the demands of the Civil Rights movement are political. If the demand for the abolition of the Special Powers Act, for example, is not political then just what kind of a demand is it?)

In Derry we have finished up participating in the "Defence Association" locking ourselves inside the Catholic area. Probably it is necessary. One must make some attempt to avoid a Catholic versus Protestant

fight. And in the situation in which we find ourselves there seems to be no other way of doing it.

But that doesn't mean we like it. It doesn't mean we like being the inexorable seepage of Catholic bigotry into the movement—

A development which is inevitable so long as the only thing which unites us is our common Catholic background.

The most alarming thing about this development is not that it has happened, but that few people seem to have recognized it for what it is. For example: At a meeting in the Stardust Ballroom to organize the "Defence Association"

a member of the Citizens Action Committee, delivered an impassioned speech in the course of which he said: "I don't believe that they will attack us, because they know that for three-hundred and sixty

four days of the year we outnumber them." That, to my mind, was one of the most nauseating things I have ever heard said on a public platform.

But everybody cheered. Everybody seemed to think it was quite a reasonable thing to say.

What is to be done now? The leaflet distributed by the Labour Party Young Socialists after the Twelfth of July riots (see text) makes some suggestions as to what socialists within the Civil Rights movement should be fighting for.

The leaflet was produced on July 19th. In the City Hotel that afternoon there was a meeting called by the Citizens Action Committee. At the meeting the chairman, Senator Claude Wilton, described the leaflet as "just another attempt to stir up trouble". The representatives of the Independent Organization Mr. Harry Doherty and Mr. William O'Connell, attacked the Labour Party for "splitting the movement". Mr. Doherty alleged: "We are trying to work for peace, but these people want to create 'strife'". The representatives of Creggan Tenants Association attacked the leaflet in similar terms.

We are likely to hear more of this sort of thing. We will hear more of it because in the coming months socialists should ceaselessly and systematically criticize the conduct of the Civil Rights Campaign and make it clear that recent events have in no way deflected us from pursuing our prime objective - that of uniting the Catholic and Protestant working class on a socialist programme. Everything else is secondary to this.

Eamonn McCann

TWENTYTHOUSANDPOUNDSMUSTBEWONTWENTYTHOUSANDPOUNDSMUSTBE
T W E N T Y T H O U S A N D P O U N D S M U S T B E W O N T W E N T Y T H O U S A N D P O U N D S M U S T B E

You may - or as is much more probable - you may not remember our "Kompetition Borner" which was launched in a blaze of publicity in "Ramparts" No. 2 when we offered ten thousand pounds to the first person who sent in the name and address of a family living in a house built by Londonderry Corporation in 1967.

No-one claimed the prize. It has, therefore, been carried over and the prize-money now stands at twenty thousand quid.

Our competition this month is based on a statement made by Mr. John Hume at a recent meeting of the Citizens Action Committee.

Mr. Hume said: "Unemployment and bad housing affect all classes and all creeds."

The twenty thousand pounds, which must be won outright, will go to the first person who sends in the name of a non-working class man or woman who lives in a slum and signs the dole.

Title: Who's Wrecking Civil Rights?

Author: Eamonn McCann

Date: 1969

Downloaded from the Irish Left Archive.

Visit www.leftarchive.ie

The Irish Left Archive is provided as a non-commercial historical resource, open to all, and has reproduced this document as an accessible digital reference. Copyright remains with its original authors. If used on other sites, we would appreciate a link back and reference to the Irish Left Archive, in addition to the original creators. For re-publication, commercial, or other uses, please contact the original owners. If documents provided to the Irish Left Archive have been created for or added to other online archives, please inform us so sources can be credited.