

To express horror at the atrocities committed in Northern Ireland should be unnecessary; the British public are now familiar with the criminal folly of the Provisionals, though they know less about the excesses of the British troops—not merely the loss of control in riot situations but the systematic brutality used against the internees. The point is that expressions of indignation are not only unnecessary but unhelpful; every time we speak or think of the soldiers as ‘murderers’ or the Provisionals as ‘gangsters’ or ‘gunmen’ we move a little further away from understanding either the individuals themselves or the situation in which they are caught up. Self-righteous rhetoric can be a dangerous and irresponsible substitute for understanding. Let us instead look at the facts.

Northern Ireland exists because a group of Protestants with guns said they were not prepared to accept Parliament’s decision about Home Rule, and that they would use their guns to make their will prevail. The British Government capitulated to their threat. Northern Ireland, in fact, like most states, was founded not by democratic decision but by the gun. What gives it its peculiar instability is not that it was born in violence but that in fifty years it has not succeeded in integrating the Catholics into the political process. (We should not be misled by talk of ‘the minority’—half the children of school age in the Province are Catholics; they emigrate before voting age because jobs are withheld from them.) This is where the Provisionals ought to stop and think. Quite apart from their violence, what chance have they of integrating a million Protestants into their kind of Ireland? Despite the moral revulsion now excited by their reckless tactics, there can be no serious doubt that if they succeeded in creating a united Ireland in which Protestant and Catholic could come together under ‘the common name of Irishman’ they would enter the mythology of history as heroes and martyrs for their country’s cause. There is, however, not the slightest reason to believe that they will. On the contrary, all the evidence suggests that they will succeed in initiating a bloody tribal war which will change nothing except to add another layer of tragedy and bitterness to the story of Ireland. In this process they have been ably assisted by Mr Heath. The introduction of internment, against the urgent advice of General Tuzo and the security forces, was a catastrophe without a single redeeming feature. There was a special insanity about suppressing violence by putting pacifists like John McGuffin into prison. Mr Faulkner, it will be remembered, after announcing that it was all a distasteful necessity in order to curb the gunmen was soon compelled to change his story. Three days, twenty-three corpses and over six thousand refugees later he said with breath-taking complacency that it had ‘brought the gunmen out into the open’.

The result has been to weld the entire Catholic community into an amorphous unity which confuses the real political and class divisions within it. In the past the Unionists have used the tribal myth with great success to persuade Protestant workers that their interests lie with those of the landowners and businessmen; it is something new and terrible that Catholic workers can now believe that their interests lie with a fasci-ststyle organization supported by some of the most reactionary politicians in Dublin.

As this is written, Mr Lynch is trying to explain the situation to Mr Heath; by the time it is read we shall know how successful he has been, but even with the best understanding available, it is hard to see a way out of the tangle. We can summarize the problem like this: Northern Ireland in its old form has collapsed, but any attempt to impose a thirty-two county state at this moment will, even if it is 'successful', produce a society more deeply divided by tribes than it now is by territory. Ireland can be formally united only by negotiation between two sovereign Irish states. The first problem is to make the northern one into a viable political unit. The proposal put forward by the Provisionals (the nearest they have come to political thinking) of independence for the historic nine counties of Ulster is too blatant a piece of inverted Unionism to be taken seriously. We have yet to hear what the people of Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan would say about being wrenched from the Republic in order to pack a Catholic Stormont. There must therefore be a basically Protestant government in the six counties which will nonetheless provide the Catholics with effective political power. Half a century of hideous experience has shown that a Westminster-style Parliament, even ameliorated by Proportional Representation, will not do this. It is certainly not beyond the ingenuity of constitutional lawyers to devise a scheme which might stand some chance of being accepted eventually by most people—but we simply haven't time. The Catholics after their disillusioning experiences with the British Army are not going to be satisfied any longer with promises, they must see justice being done immediately. At the very least this means an end to internment and some curtailment of the political power of the Orange Order, in fact it must mean the temporary replacement of Stormont by an appointed administration on the lines of the Derry Commission. We should remember, though, that the Commission was successful because it ruled a Catholic majority whose lot was improving, the new administration would be trying to rule a Protestant majority whose privileges were being decreased.

It is just possible that if this were clearly seen by the Protestants to be the only available road to a stable, predominantly Protestant, state, separate from the Republic and acknowledged as such by Dublin, all but the most bigoted might co-operate with it. Similarly,

*(Continued on page 471)*