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Introduction

This book focuses on the use of internment without trial in Northern Ireland in the early 1970s. It argues that internment has not been given proper academic attention and needs reappraisal. Central to this analysis are the initial years of internment, and subsequent events, which are necessary in any attempt to reanalyse why the Troubles escalated in the manner they did. Three main areas will be considered:

1. the high politics surrounding the introduction of the measure and an assessment of the intelligence available for the initial arrest operation;
2. an examination of the repercussions of the use of internment up to 1975;
3. the development of the dynamics of the conflict, outside of Belfast and Derry, between 1970 and 1972.

Chapter 2 reassesses the intelligence situation in regard to internment. The roles of the British and Stormont governments will also be clarified. This research throws a new light on the political significance of the introduction of internment. The attitudes of the Stormont and Westminster governments regarding the measure are examined. The role of the Dublin government is only mentioned in passing, as it is beyond the constraints of this book. William Beattie Smith contends that this period saw the British government pursue a policy towards Northern Ireland which appeared to give primacy to a security solution over a political settlement.[1] It is not clear if this was actually the case. However, it is obvious that around this time the Westminster government had adopted a policy towards Northern Ireland that contained a much greater security emphasis and that internment was a manifestation of this change of emphasis. This chapter will examine a number of questions. What were the respective positions of the Stormont and Westminster administrations in relation to internment? What was the true nature of the initial arrest operation? What was the level of intelligence on both republican and loyalist paramilitaries?

Many commentators have discussed internment, but it has not been considered in sufficient detail, and key aspects of its importance have been glossed over. Chapter 3 will provide a more comprehensive account of the use of internment that covers most of the repercussions associated with the measure. This will involve a reappraisal of both the long-term and short-term effects of internment, some of which have not been previously identified. This chapter will explore a number of areas. How did the use of repressive measures by a liberal state impact on the targeted community? What were the major effects of internment in the wider context? How did internment change the Irish Republican Army (IRA), especially the Provisional Irish Republican Army (PIRA)? What was the main long-term legacy of the use of internment for the conflict?

This book provides a detailed account of internment and looks at various under-researched aspects, specifically the situation outside of Belfast and Derry in Chapters 4 and 5. In researching the areas outside of the two main cities, a detailed study of four provincial towns will be undertaken: Lurgan (Co. Armagh), Newry (Co. Down), Dungannon (Co. Tyrone) and Enniskillen (Co. Fermanagh). Many republicans, and indeed some historians, claim that the PIRA had already become a significant guerrilla movement before the introduction of internment.[2] This may well be true regarding the position of the PIRA in Belfast and, to a lesser extent, Derry; however, this was not the case in other areas. What is true is that there was undoubtedly an upsurge in PIRA activity across Northern Ireland after the introduction of the measure. The figures show an increase of 600 per cent in people killed by the PIRA, outside of Belfast and Derry, in the year immediately after the introduction of internment.[3]

Niall Ó Dochartaigh maintains regarding the position of the PIRA that:

> despite widespread hostility to the army, alienation from the state and aspiration to a united Ireland, few people in Derry supported an IRA offensive and the Provisionals were still a relatively small and marginalised splinter group. Even by the spring of 1971, the Provisionals were by no means a major political force in Derry.[4]

Similarly, in this study, it will be established that it was not until *after* the introduction of internment that the PIRA began to conduct significant urban guerrilla warfare across the *whole* of Northern Ireland. Allied to this point is the fact that the dynamics of the conflict did not become uniform across the entire country until the same period. In essence, a minute reconstruction of the evolution of the Troubles outside of the

two main urban centres will be provided. The two main questions investigated are:

- What was the nature of the political and security situation in the four towns before the introduction of internment?
- What was the nature of the political and security situation in the four towns after the introduction of internment?

There have been many books that have examined the Troubles, although these wider-ranging works obviously have a different focus and do not give a detailed account of internment. Many of the above questions have not been properly examined, and these are the principal areas that will be addressed in this book.

Background

It was in December 1969 that the IRA split into two factions; Sinn Féin was to endure a similar break shortly afterwards. The breakaway group became known as the PIRA while the remaining group was called the Official Irish Republican Army (OIRA). The PIRA were also known as the Provos, while the OIRA became known as the Stickies, a nickname that was a reference to the adhesive nature of the Easter Lily which the OIRA wore to commemorate dead republicans.

The split had essentially occurred over how the movement was to be defined. Under the leadership of Cathal Goulding, directed from Dublin, the organisation had become increasingly left-wing. According to Gerry Adams, Goulding made a landmark speech, at Bodenstown in June 1967, attacking the physical-force tradition and favouring socialist policies.[5] This was a drift that many in republican circles resented, especially among the Northern membership. At a secret meeting in Belfast in August 1969, Belfast IRA men met to discuss their disillusionment with the direction the movement was taking. At this meeting were some of the key figures in the future Provisional movement: Billy McKee, John Kelly and his brother Billy, Joe Cahill, Leo Martin, Seamus Twomey, Gerry Adams, Dáithí Ó Conaill and Jimmy Drumm.[6] These men were to form the nucleus of the new rejectionist movement leadership along with Ruairí Ó Brádaigh and Seán Mac Stíofáin, the Provisionals' chief of staff from 1969 to 1972.[7] The Provisionals were traditional in outlook and saw the organisation's primary role as a military one; they rejected participating in the democratic parliaments of Stormont, Westminster and Leinster House.

In January 1970, the Army Council of the PIRA met to decide military policy. They decided that their most urgent priority was defence

from loyalists and the British Army.[8] Crucially, the Army Council also decided that when the movement was strong enough they would launch an 'all-out offensive against the British occupation system'.[9] The British Army had been brought into Northern Ireland because the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) could not cope with the violence that occurred during the civil-rights crisis. Initially they had been welcomed by the Catholic community. As one paratrooper stated, 'always tea and coffee from the Catholics … We felt like knights in shining armour, like Sir Galahad.'[10] This was all to change, and increasingly the Army was seen as the enemy of the nationalist community and the upholder of the unionist government that discriminated against Catholics.

By the end of January 1970, the PIRA had a Belfast brigade which was structured into battalion and company levels. Billy McKee was Officer Commanding (OC), and Seamus Twomey, who had been interned during the Second World War, was his adjutant.[11] Two other prominent figures were Jimmy Steele and Proinsias MacAirt, another internee of the 1940s, who were both responsible for the setting up of the *Republican News*.[12] The republican newspaper was to become very important to the republican movement in its propaganda war during the Troubles. For the PIRA, the conflict that was to unfold was to be seen in simplistic terms, and the responsibility for it lay with the British partition of Ireland. As Seán Mac Stíofáin explained, 'England could not hold any part of Ireland except by military force.' The British Army was not conscripted, and therefore he could have no sympathy for the ordinary British soldier, even if he were killed.[13] This view appears too simplistic and does not take into account that many young men may have joined the Army out of economic necessity. Volunteer Brendan Hughes also recalled,

> The only objective I ever heard in the early days was to get the Brits out of Ireland. I remember sitting in Proinsias McAirt's house, which was the hub of republican activity at the time, and I recall Billy McKee saying that this is our opportunity now with the Brits on the streets, this is what we wanted, open confrontation with the army.[14]

Hughes, also known as 'The Dark', was ultimately to fall out with the Provisional movement in the 1990s over its decision to call a ceasefire and enter the constitutional process. He felt that he had been betrayed by the movement he had served: 'It was like getting a hundred people to push this boat out; a boat that is stuck in the sand … and then the boat sails off, leaving the hundred people behind.'[15]

Initially, the PIRA did not confront the Army in open combat; instead, they became involved in the continuing street violence which, originating from the civil-rights marches and counter-demonstrations, had become

more localised sectarian confrontations.[16] Throughout early 1970, disturbances continued in Belfast. On 17 May, the rioting appeared, to the authorities, to be pre-planned and organised, as did the disturbance on the previous weekend, and in both cases the confrontation was between Catholics and the Army exclusively.[17] However, it does not seem that the agitators had the wholehearted support of the local community, as one priest stated:

> Some people are convinced that the disturbances on Sunday and yesterday morning were organised by a small group of militant people who were determined to get rid of the military … One man told me that as far as he was concerned the soldiers were a well-disciplined force and he could find nothing wrong with them. There are people in this area who apparently do not want normal conditions to prevail and are out to create trouble at all costs.[18]

The continuing street violence, along with the Chief Constable Sir Arthur Young's efforts to reform the RUC, brought the Army and Catholics into more confrontations. Under Young's guidance, the Hunt Committee's recommendations were being implemented. A further report, published in February 1970, restructured the RUC along the lines of police forces in Great Britain.[19] Young wanted to turn the RUC into a normal everyday police force which would be supported by the general public. This, of course, meant that it would become less involved in controlling street violence, which, in turn, meant more street confrontations for the Army. This could only lead to further animosity between the Army and nationalists.

As the confrontations were escalating between the Army and nationalists, Major James Chichester-Clark, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, was having plenty of problems of his own trying to contain hard-line unionists from within and outside of the UUP. He had been elected on 1 May 1969, replacing Terence O'Neill. In his election address, he made it clear that his two main objectives would be 'peace and the removal of tension'. He also declared that there would be no going back on the reform programme, including the commitment to 'one man one vote'.[20]

Chichester-Clark was to face the same problems as his predecessor in trying to appease hard-liners within unionism who were against reform and at the same time satisfying British demands for change. O'Neill continually made reference to British opinion, which needed to be understood in the context of the changing relationship between Stormont and Westminster. From the mid-1960s on, there was a perception among unionists that the British government was willing to intervene on behalf

of nationalists in Northern Ireland affairs, which could possibly lead to direct rule.[21] Tensions over the reform of local government early in 1970 produced a fierce reaction from grass-roots unionists, especially in the west of the province. A widening gap was developing between a modernising government, keen to be seen in a favourable light in Britain, and ordinary unionists, who considered their government to be too compliant to Westminster wishes.[22] These tensions were exposed when Harold Wilson called an election in the summer of 1970.[23] The Revd Ian Paisley attacked Chichester-Clark's security policies:

> We are living in serious days and in the midst of a tremendous battle. I am making a call tonight; let's have the B-Specials back again. When a country is in danger, fellow Protestants, what do you do? You strengthen its defences. What did this government do? They tore down our defences, the first line of which was the RUC and an armed RUC. They took away the guns from the police.[24]

Paisley claimed during the election that a pact had been made with the Ulster Unionists not to field Protestant Unionist candidates in a number of constituencies, a claim rejected by Chichester-Clark. Whatever the case, the election was to prove successful for Paisley, and he won North Antrim; he had struck a blow against the Ulster Unionists.[25] A few months earlier, Paisley had also won the Bannside by-election for Stormont. Both victories were hugely symbolic triumphs for the brand of populist unionism or loyalism which Paisley promoted. He articulated with more conviction the defensive mentality of 'no surrender'.[26]

The situation deteriorated further during the lead-up to the 12 July demonstrations of 1970. In June during the 'Mini-Twelfth' celebrations, in Belfast, the PIRA shot five Protestants dead. This engagement was centred on St Matthew's Church in the Short Strand and has become part of republican folklore, the republican narrative being that the PIRA had emerged victorious in their defence of the area from a Protestant mob hell-bent on destruction. This version is, of course, contested by Protestants, who maintain that they were fired on first.[27] The rank-and-file unionists blamed what they perceived to be the soft approach being adopted by the security forces.[28] The sequel to the June violence came in the shape of the Falls Road Curfew over the weekend of 3–5 July. The curfew and search of the area started just after 10 p.m. on the Friday night and lasted until 9 a.m. on Sunday morning. During the operation, 100 firearms, 100 home-made bombs, 250 pounds of explosives and 21,000 rounds of ammunition were uncovered.[29] The curfew has been seen in republican circles as a defining moment in the history of the Troubles. Gerry Adams believes that it was a 'turning point for many

Catholics in their attitude to the British government and its forces'.[30] Indeed, William Whitelaw, future Secretary of State (SOS), believed that after the curfew 'the image of the army … shifted towards that of the old enemy" aligning itself with unionism to oppose the beleaguered minority'.[31] By August 1970, the intelligence services were considering what plans needed to be made if internment was to be introduced.[32]

The violence escalated early in 1971 following severe rioting in Ballymurphy and Ardoyne. Then, on 6 February, the PIRA murdered Gunner Robert Curtis, who is recorded in *Lost Lives* as the first British soldier to die violently during the Troubles.[33] However, before Curtis's murder, twenty-one British soldiers had lost their lives, mainly through accidents, in Northern Ireland. These deaths included Sergeant John Platt, who was killed as a result of a road traffic accident on 3 February, apparently after an IRA ambush.[34] The murder of Curtis was followed by the brutal murder of three Scottish soldiers. At this time, PIRA activities were definitely increasing, and these killings were part of this increase in activity. These murders undoubtedly worsened the deteriorating situation, and, two days later, 4,000 shipyard workers marched to UUP headquarters to demand the internment of IRA leaders.[35] The murders of these three young Scottish soldiers will be discussed further in Chapter 3.

Under severe pressure, Chichester-Clark went to London to demand tougher security measures; he met Reginald Maudling, Edward Heath and Lord Carrington on 16 March. He demanded massive troop reinforcements but was offered only 1,300 extra soldiers. In face of such meagre support from Westminster and unbearable opposition at home, Chichester-Clark had no option, and within days he had resigned.[36] Interestingly, at the same time, 'the Emergency Provisions Bill was taken from the files and amended to provide for a "Secretary for Northern Ireland"'.[37]

Constitutional nationalist politics in 1970 were to undergo a dramatic change with the emergence of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). The party's inaugural press conference was held on 21 August 1970 in Belfast with John Hume, Ivan Cooper, Paddy O'Hanlon, Austin Currie and Paddy Devlin, with Gerry Fitt as leader – plus a Republican Labour senator, Patrick Wilson, in attendance. As Peter McLoughlin outlines, the party was committed from the start to provide a strong opposition to unionism and to seek a reunification of the country – but only with the consent of the majority in Northern Ireland.[38] Throughout 1970 and 1971, the SDLP became increasingly disillusioned with the unionist government. Although reforms such as the Hunt Report were being activated, it seemed to the party that attitudes had changed little.

The SDLP found itself in a complicated position. They were spectators to the reform package, which was doing little to change radically the plight of nationalists. They were unable to introduce legislation because the parliamentary rules and electoral system were not being reformed. More importantly, although reform was taking place, the determination to end institutionalised discrimination against Catholics was not apparent. The main threat to the SDLP's constitutional position came from the PIRA and escalating street violence. Ian McAllister maintains that, as a result, abstentionism was always considered as an option, and the threat of withdrawal from Stormont was used in connection with the use of internment.[39] As the security situation deteriorated, Chichester-Clark attempted to placate his hard-line critics by obtaining stricter security measures. His failure resulted in his resignation and replacement by Brian Faulkner. It fell to Faulkner to try and achieve some kind of Catholic involvement in government, as well as improve the security position.[40] His efforts were also to be constrained by hard-line unionists. Stormont's own research had confirmed that the loss of two recent by-elections 'pointed clearly to a lack of faith in the government's ability to maintain law and order'.[41] Forebodingly, Ronnie Burroughs, United Kingdom Representative for Northern Ireland (UKREPNI), did not hold out much hope for Faulkner's chances of achieving a political settlement:

> In the earnest hope that I am wrong I believe that Faulkner is over-optimistic in believing that he can split the right-wing … Neither the broad mass of the Unionist Party nor the minority have been given anything substantial to cling on to. This is good politics. But I am a little concerned by the initial reactions of the SDLP … Hume in particular smells blood and has been uncompromisingly hostile. If the right-wing and the opposition combine, however unconsciously, to bring Faulkner down his chances of survival are slim.[42]

It wasn't long before Faulkner put forward his proposals for a form of inclusive government. On 22 June, the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Northern Ireland parliament – a date which was deliberately chosen – he suggested the setting up of three functional committees covering social services, the environment and industry.[43] These committees were to operate without executive powers, but they would review and consider government policy and provide 'a means of expressing legitimate parliamentary interest in the overall quality of government proposals and performance'. The committees would consist of nine members, each broadly representative of party strength in the House. Additionally, 'the opposition should provide at least two chairmen, the posts being salaried and having real status and importance in the new scheme of parliamentary operation'. As a final enticement, Faulkner hinted that

other constitutional changes, such as the introduction of proportional representation (PR), could be considered in the future. Initially, the response from the SDLP was reserved, although Paddy Devlin did believe that the proposal showed 'plenty of imagination';[44] while Gerry Fitt wanted to test Faulkner's offer of accommodation to the minority community.[45]

Of course, Faulkner's motives can be called into question here; there is some doubt as to whether they were genuine or not. It could well have been that he hoped once he had got the SDLP into the constitutional framework that they would not be prepared to risk all their gains by listening to the inevitable calls for a walkout once repressive security measures were introduced. The proposals seem to have been an attempt at a balancing act by Faulkner. He hoped to keep constitutional nationalists on board while at the same time satisfying the hard-liners within unionism with harsher security measures. It is also just possible too that Faulkner had one eye on the Westminster when he introduced his proposals. With internment in mind he wanted to show the British that he had already tried the political path but that it had failed.

Whatever the case, for a short period he did seem to have obtained the cautious support of the SDLP, who were hoping to use the proposals as a basis for more reform.[46] Any such approval proved to be short-lived. Street violence continued to escalate, and, in May 1971, Faulkner announced that 'any soldier seeing any person with a weapon or seeing any person acting suspiciously may fire either to warn or may fire with effect, depending on the circumstances and without waiting on orders from anyone'.[47] Effectively, the army was given permission to shoot anyone they deemed to be a danger. The directive was seen by many nationalists as proof of a new, tougher security policy. Faulkner was playing to the 'hawks' within unionism and delivering the tougher security measures that they had been demanding. It didn't take long for the new rules of engagement to effect the SDLP's position. On 8 July, Seamus Cusack and Desmond Beattie were shot dead, in contested circumstances, during rioting in Derry. The SDLP issued a statement on 12 July:

> There comes a point where to continue to do so is to appear to condone the present system. That point in our view has been reached … The British government must face up to the clear consequences of their intervention of August 1969 and reveal their determination to produce a political solution … If our demand is not met … we will withdraw immediately from parliament.[48]

The statement demonstrated the pressure the party was under. Its continued presence in Stormont led the nationalist community to see it as

accepting the actions of the government's security forces.[49] A few short days later, after having obtained no assurances from the British government, the SDLP confirmed their intention to withdraw from Stormont. Certainly, Faulkner could be left in no doubt that the nationalist community and the SDLP would be opposed to any attempt to introduce internment. Despite this, Faulkner was to claim in his memoirs that he had 'received many letters from housewives in places such as Andersontown, in West Belfast, urging him to get the terrorists "off our backs".' He also maintained that he felt at the time that very many Catholics were prepared to tolerate internment in order to break the IRA.[50] Similar sentiments had been expressed by Gerry Fitt, according to Burroughs when he advocated the 'immediate internment of all Provisional IRA men … He [Fitt] assures me that the Catholic population of the city would on the whole be vastly relieved by the removal of the IRA yoke on their necks.'[51] Burroughs' position of UKREPNI had been introduced by the Wilson government, and his mandate was to see that the reform programme was carried out and there was no backsliding.[52] Faulkner's and Burroughs' claims may have had some substance, especially after the murder of the three Scottish soldiers in February 1971. However, it is certainly debatable whether or not the introduction of the measure had any support from the nationalist community by August. The importance of the timing of the introduction of internment will be examined further in Chapter 3.

In late June, Belfast was becoming increasingly ungovernable, and the Army had virtually lost control. All the blame for the ongoing street violence should not be apportioned solely to nationalists as the rioting and intimidation came from both sides. Indeed, it is claimed that as many as 1,500 Catholics fled over the border in July 1970 as a result of loyalist actions.[53] Outside of Northern Ireland, a new Conservative government was elected, with Heath as Prime Minister. Heath appointed Maudling as Home Secretary, Douglas-Home as Foreign Secretary and Lord Carrington as Defence Secretary.[54] The new government continued the policy of reform of the previous Labour administration. These policies included police reform under the auspices of the Hunt Report of October 1969, the establishment of the Community Relations Commission and its ministry, legislation prohibiting incitement to hatred, the centralisation of housing responsibilities and of local-authority functions.[55] However, the period of just less than two years that saw the Conservatives coming to power and the introduction of direct rule was to be marked by increased violence, the resurgence of the IRA and the growing importance of an effective security policy. As Snedden outlines, the Conservative government had adopted 'a tougher line focused

on regaining control over the catholic [sic] working class heartlands'.[56] In addition, the reform package looked increasingly inadequate to halt the slide to large-scale communal violence. The government's frustration was to be articulated by Maudling when he stated that 'the disorder no longer related to legitimate grievances of an oppressed minority'.[57]

As Anthony Craig points out, much political debate, on the introduction of internment, centres on Faulkner and when he became convinced of its necessity. Some of the literature suggests that he had always been convinced of its usefulness;[58] while others depict Faulkner as being gradually persuaded.[59] Craig believes that 'this axiom ignores one crucial point, as the British could have introduced internment alone, something that Stormont could not have done. Indeed London had been planning for such a scenario for just as long as the Northern Ireland government.'[60] So, what were the respective governmental positions over the introduction of internment? With this in mind, the differing positions adopted by Stormont and Westminster over the introduction of internment, and the intelligence surrounding the operation, will now be examined.

Notes

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