Decade of TERROR

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SMA
Dedication

To the families of the hunger strikers, who "speak their names to their own hearts in the long nights." Their steadfastness, courage and loyalty have been an inspiration to all who believe in the cause of Ireland, United, Gaelic, and Free.
A Decade of TERROR

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Introduction

"Human rights violations, reported to us by a number of reliable sources, have put Northern Ireland on an unenviable par with some of the most barbarous regimes of communist commissars or tinhorn Latin American dictators. The British are trampling on the rights of Irish citizens in a manner reminiscent of Oliver Cromwell's iron-fisted rule more than three centuries ago."

So wrote Jack Anderson in a column published in more than 800 newspapers throughout the United States in October 1978. Because of its policies in Ireland, the United Kingdom earned the dubious honor of becoming the first nation to be found guilty of violating Article 3 of the Human Rights Convention by the European Court of Human Rights. Amnesty International and, more recently, the International League for Human Rights, have charged that Britain continues to violate civilized standards in north-east Ireland. Despite this, many in the communications media continue to label the defenders of the victims as terrorists, while those who have murdered, tortured and intimidated are promoted as peace-keepers!

We give in this pamphlet facts about the British Army and the Irish Republican Army. We include also excerpts from a statement made by Meurig Parri, one of a growing number of former members of the British Army now active in the Northern Ireland Veteran's Association and the Troops Out Movement. We believe that all who weigh the evidence will have no difficulty in identifying the real terrorists in occupied Ireland.

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The British Army

In August 1969, because of assaults by police-led mobs on the minority ghettos of Derry and Belfast, British troops were sent to north-east Ireland to maintain order. From then until mid-1970, we had the "honeymoon" period, when the people welcomed the soldiers into their areas. In retrospect, this period is seen as corresponding to what Britain's Brigadier Frank Kitson described in Low Intensity Operations as the peaceful phase of a counter-insurgency operation, when the army mixes socially with the enemy and gathers information about the community and its leaders.

The beginning of the next phase in June 1970 coincided with a change of government in Britain. The role of the army was seen to change. Mobs attacked a Nationalist area in Belfast, and the army refused to send troops to protect those besieged. On July 3, 1970, a section of the Lower Falls was saturated with CS gas and put under curfew for thirty-six hours. Troops went from house to house, looting and smashing as they searched. Then two Unionist Party members were brought on a "victory" tour of the area in an army jeep. The new get-tough army tactics resulted in mass resignations of non-Unionist appointees from public offices and the flight of thousands to safety in the south of Ireland.

The army was now seen by the people in minority areas as just another instrument of Orange or Unionist supremacy. Incidents of rioting increased. At this time, the Irish Republican Army was acting defensively only. "At no time", it was noted in the log of the period at British Army Headquarters, "was there aggressive action by organized groups." In January 1971, a series of talks was held between officers of both armies to discuss a joint effort to stop the riots which were then a feature of daily life in Belfast. News of the talks leaked and on February 3rd, in response to Orange pressure, the British Army raided the Clonard area of Belfast to arrest the men with whom they had been negotiating. The offensive role of the IRA dates from that time.

On August 9, 1971, the British Army used the information gleaned in the honeymoon period in Operation Demetrius. Three hundred and forty-two members of the minority were taken into custody in a 4:30 a.m. army swoop. The methods used were described as reminiscent of those used by Nazis when arresting Jews in the nineteen-thirties. Those arrested were interned without trial. Britain later conceded in preliminary hearings of the European Court of Human Rights that they had been tortured. By February 1975, 2,158 persons had been interned without trial.

Jack Holland on page 91 of Too Long A Sacrifice writes: "Between 1972 and 1977 the UDA (Ulster Defense Association) murdered approximately four hundred forty people; it wounded and seriously injured thousands more. It has been directly responsible for a massive intimidation campaign
in Belfast, where about sixty thousand people have been forced to leave their homes largely because of its activities. Hardly a week goes by without its death squads striking somewhere in Northern Ireland.” The Derry branch of the UDA in a statement published in *The Irish Times* in February 1981 claimed that one of its former leading members had been exposed as an officer in British Military Intelligence. For years he had passed on a steady stream of information including details of Republicans as possible assassination targets. The figures given by Jack Holland account for 72% of civilian “sectarian” deaths for the period mentioned and more than 20% of total violent deaths in north-east Ireland since 1969. Yet the British government has refused to declare the UDA an illegal organization.

The British Army has also, for propaganda purposes, on occasion deliberately ignored IRA advance warnings. Seven civilians and two soldiers were killed by bombs placed by the IRA in Cavehill and Oxford Street, Belfast, on July 21, 1972. The Public Protection Agency and the Samaritans have both confirmed that they received advance warnings which they passed on immediately. While nothing was done to clear civilians from the area, the British Broadcasting Corporation was alerted in time “for on the spot coverage of the explosions and aftermath.”

British Intelligence personnel were suspect from the beginning in the 1972 bombings in Dublin which killed two persons and injured more than a hundred others. Following the exposure of the Littlejohn brothers as British agents, one of them, Kenneth, threatened in a British Broadcasting Corporation interview to reveal the names of those responsible. Both brothers had been signed up for the British Secret Service by Lord Carrington, then Defense Minister, and Geoffrey Johnson-Smith, Cabinet aide to Prime Minister Heath. They were ordered to carry out bank robberies and other illegal activities — including petrol bombing of police stations — in the Republic of Ireland in order to discredit the IRA.

The moral pressure of world reaction to internment without trial forced the British to seek alternative means to achieve the same ends. The law, Brigadier Frank Kitson had suggested, could be exploited as “just another weapon in the government’s arsenal, and in this case it becomes little more than a propaganda cover for the disposal of unwanted members of the public.” Diplock Courts were set up, special courts where specially selected judges, operating under special rules of evidence, were empowered to convict solely on the basis of confessions signed by suspects while in police custody. Suspects may be held for up to seven days in occupied Ireland without being allowed to see an attorney. Fathers Denis Faul and Raymond Murray, prison chaplains, have published a series of books giving details of the brutal methods used by members of the Royal Ulster Constabulary to force detainees to sign confessions. Amnesty International
declared in June 1978 that "maltreatment of suspected terrorists by the RUC has taken place with sufficient frequency to warrant the establishment of a public inquiry to investigate it." On March 18, 1981, the International League for Human Rights called on Britain to revise immediately the emergency laws for the interrogation of suspects and urged that disciplinary action be taken against police officers who extract confessions.

Britain's Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, has made statements about the prisoners of Long Kesh in which she has referred to them as "convicted criminals." "They would never have been convicted in an American court", Dr. David Lowry, an English-born Professor at New York School of Law, has commented. "These men were put on an elaborate conveyor belt in which innocent people were railroaded into prison. They were denied due process. Perhaps some are criminals, perhaps some killed innocent people, but we will never know."

The Diplock Courts are part of a system designed to intimidate the Nationalists of occupied Ireland. "It might be necessary", Brigadier Frank Kitson had written, using a Mao Tse Tung analogy for insurgents and host population, "to get at the fish by polluting the water." The principal method of polluting the water, however, is the house search. "Soldiers, trained as shock troops or commandoes, seal off a Nationalist area in the early morning hours; doors of homes are then broken down, men, women and children are dragged from their beds at gunpoint; floor boards are ripped up, plumbing fixtures (including toilets) smashed, furniture ripped open and, for good measure, crucifixes and other religious articles smashed." From 1971 to 1978 a total of 301,566 house searches were carried out. Making allowances for relative population sizes, it would take 41,616,108 house searches in the United States of America to equal the number carried out in occupied Ireland.

Northern Ireland was from its beginnings an undemocratically constituted statelet. In 1918, the only time all the people of Ireland were given an opportunity to vote in one election, they returned seventy-three candidates favoring total British withdrawal, twenty-six Unionists and six candidates of the Irish Parliamentary Party. In 1920, contrary to the wishes of the majority, Ireland was partitioned. Fifty years of Stormont legislation, according to the June 1969 Review of the International Commission of Jurists, had but one purpose: "Discrimination in housing and in employment has been utilized in order to weaken economically the Catholic minority and thus to preclude Catholics from acquiring property rights and to induce emigration." The National Council for Civil Liberties Commission of Inquiry reported in 1935: "The Northern Irish Government have used Special Powers (internment without trial) towards securing the domination of one particular political faction and at the same time towards curtailing the lawful activities of its opponents."
The actions of the British Government in north-east Ireland today, if investigated by an impartial commission, would merit the indictment made by the 1935 Inquiry team against the Unionist government: "The close relations maintained by the Government's leading members with the Orange Order, coupled with the little use made of Special Powers against activities notoriously productive of disorder, provides some show of reason for the view that the Government permits the perpetuation of, rather than seeks to quell, sectarian troubles."
The Irish Republican Army

The Provisional IRA was formed in 1969-70 following a split between the more nationalist and militant Provisionals and the Marxist-inclined Officials. The origin of the split goes back to 1963 when Cathal Goulding became Chief of Staff. Under his direction, the IRA became less militant and moved to the political left. A policy statement, “Ireland Today”, drawn up in 1968, advocated recognition of both Stormont and Dublin Parliaments and a link up with the Communist Party of Ireland. At a secret meeting of Sinn Fein in December 1969, a majority of those present voted in favor of the new policy. At the Ard-Fheis or Convention, held on January 11, 1970, the vote was 153 for adoption and 104 against. The two factions separated, with the non-Marxists becoming the Provisional IRA.

At the time of the split, only thirty of the approximately 150 members of the Belfast IRA sided with the Provisionals. Almost all the quartermasters, who had custody of the arms stocks of their units, stayed with the Officials. Although starting with relatively few men, very few weapons and without the means to purchase any, the Provisionals had a number of factors in their favor. "There was", as Conor Cruise O'Brien has written, "no taint of communism about them." Unlike the Officials, who had failed to protect besieged ghettos in the 1969 pogrom, they quickly demonstrated a willingness to use what weapons they had in the defense of nationalist areas being attacked by Orange mobs. The British Army was their best recruiting agent. From June 1970 on, British soldiers were seen not as peace-keepers but as just another group acting in the interests of Orange supremacy. The decisive turning point came on Wednesday, February 3, 1971, when the Second Royal Anglians cordoned off and searched the Clonard and Ardoyne areas of Belfast. To quote the London Sunday Times Insight team: “But in the Clonard, the Army stayed around after the search, and Catholic rioting broke out. Then when Protestant workers from the near-by Mackie’s engineering works came out to lunch and began to jeer the Catholic crowds, and even pelt them with ‘Belfast confetti’ — as the local mixture of ballbearings and machine-shop swarf is called — the Army and police ostentatiously turned their backs to the Protestant confetti-throwers and concentrated on the Catholics.” From that time, the majority in nationalist areas looked on the Provisionals as their sole defenders, and their numbers increased rapidly.

The needs of the time and the scarcity of armaments explain the defensive role played by the Provisional IRA in the first year of existence. When war was declared on them by the Prime Minister of north-east Ireland on February 7, 1971, they had the manpower and soon proved that they could use their relatively limited resources effectively in an offensive war.

Ironically, the guerrilla tactics employed by the IRA had been outlined for the Provisionals in pamphlets authorized for distribution to the people of

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Britain years before when an invasion by Hitler's armies appeared imminent. Britain's Major General Anthony Farrar-Hockley had predicted that a bombing campaign would be the only military option open to the Provisionals. Such a campaign was initiated with a two-fold purpose: (1) To stretch the British Army to the limits of its resources and thus keep pressure off nationalist areas; (2) to weaken the economy by sabotage operations against government and commercial property, with the British taxpayer having to pick up the bill. The success of the campaign may be seen in the published figures. Compensation payments for property damage have increased from 2,780,604 pounds in 1970/71 to 39,629,926 pounds in 1979/80. The Westminster subvention to the budget of north-east Ireland, 74 million pounds in 1969/70, climbed to 956 million pounds in 1979/80. Annual expenditures on Army, Royal Ulster Constabulary and Ulster Defense Regiment show similar increases.

Part of the British counterattack has been a propaganda effort to label the IRA as terrorists. George Washington in his day was subjected to a similar smear campaign. A terrorist is one who threatens, maims or kills innocent civilians to further political goals. The IRA have consistently given advance warnings whenever bombs have been placed which could endanger civilians. Their strict adherence to this policy has been generally acknowledged in occupied Ireland. Kennedy Lindsay, no friend of the IRA, writes in Ambush at Tully-West: "The public had also come to accept a rule of thumb that the Provisional IRA gave a warning when they placed a bomb and loyalists rarely gave one." Even William Borders, writer of specials on Ireland for the New York Times, had to acknowledge (New York Times, January 30, 1980) that the IRA concentrate attacks on those actively in the service of the government. Most civilians killed have in fact been from the minority community. This fact is concealed, however, because it would contradict the view of the situation Britain wishes to give neutral observers. Requests to date to British Information Services for a breakdown of civilian deaths by religious affiliation are met with: "These statistics are not available."

Two incidents in which the IRA are considered by many to have departed from their general policy must be referred to. There is no doubt that all who thought of Lord Mountbatten as a hero condemned the IRA for his assassination. To others, he was a member of the Royal Family circle in whose name Irish citizens have been and are being tortured and murdered. He represented British fighting forces and, although retired, was used to boost morale. At the time of his death, he was vacationing in the south of Ireland. Americans might ask themselves how they would react if the Ayatollah Khomeini had come on a pleasure trip to the United States while their fellow citizens were being tortured in Iran.
In January 1981, Sir Norman Stronge and his son James, both high ranking members of the Orange Order and the Royal Black Institution — the “creme de la creme of Orangemen” — were assassinated. The IRA accepted responsibility in a statement issued shortly afterwards and acknowledged that it was a departure from their normal policy. It was intended as a warning. Four civilian leaders of the national campaign in behalf of the Blanketmen of Long Kesh and the Women of Armagh had been killed and two others seriously injured. Civilian leaders of the Orange community would no longer be immune from attack if the assassination of Republican spokespersons did not cease.

Britain has tried to have the war in Ireland viewed as a sectarian struggle in which Catholics and Protestants are opposed. Throughout Irish history, Irish Protestants have participated in the struggle for independence, and this tradition has been maintained in the current phase of the Irish war of national liberation. Ivor Bell, a Protestant, was until his capture one of the leaders of the IRA in Belfast. He took part in truce talks with British officials as an IRA negotiator. Two Protestants, Ronald Bunting and John Turnley, were among the H-Block campaign leaders assassinated by the Ulster Defense Association. (The New York Times, which usually refers to religious affiliations in the north of Ireland context refrained from doing so when commenting on the deaths of the two men, alluding to them as ‘nationalists’).

Like any insurgent organization, the IRA needs arms and has to get them wherever it can. As part of a propaganda effort specifically designed for Americans, allegations have been made that the IRA is supported directly or indirectly by Moscow, and that its members receive training in the Middle East. References to IRA being trained in Lebanon and elsewhere were made recently in a series of exchanges between the governments of the Republic of Ireland and Israel. “Exhaustive inquiries by the Irish Special Branch and by the Irish embassy in Beirut have failed to produce any evidence to support recent allegations that members of the IRA have trained in PLO camps in Lebanon.” The Irish Ambassador in the area “made this clear to Israeli Foreign Ministry officials this week and said that if the Israeli authorities had evidence to the contrary, they should put it on the table.” This is also the view of Britain’s Brigadier Glover who stated in his 1978 intelligence assessment of the north-east Ireland situation for British officials, “We doubt whether the PIRA receives financial aid from Libya or any other overseas government” and, “There are no indications of any substantial link between the Soviet Union and either wing of the IRA, nor do we expect any links developing in the next five years.”

Since assuming an offensive role in 1971, the IRA has consistently given advance warnings whenever bombs were placed which could endanger
civilians. At times such warnings have been deliberately ignored by the British Army for propaganda purposes. On occasion bombs have exploded prematurely. Radio-controlled IRA bombs have been deliberately "triggered" in civilian areas by British personnel using electronic equipment. In a few cases, IRA members have been harshly disciplined for carrying out operations contrary to the advance warning policy. The IRA has maintained credibility with nationalists by admitting the truth even when it was distasteful. Without the support of the nationalist population, it could not continue. The extent of that support was demonstrated recently in the Fermanagh-South Tyrone by-election. That support will be forthcoming as long as the IRA remains faithful to the principles of Tone and Pearse and all who through the centuries of Irish history have upheld the right of the people of Ireland to self-determination.

The Provisional IRA has all through the current struggle shown a willingness to discuss peace. They submitted interim proposals for a ceasefire in September 1971, but the offer was ignored and the war continued. On March 10, 1972, the IRA ordered a unilateral cessation of hostilities so that peace proposals could be discussed. The truce was not observed by the British Army, and the war continued. In June 1972, the IRA again made an approach to British authorities and, following a bilateral cessation of hostilities, both sides began talking on July 7. The truce was soon broken, however, for reasons summarized by the Cork Examiner in a July 10 editorial: "No matter how sympathetically one views the admittedly difficult role of the security forces in the North, it is impossible to exonerate them from almost total culpability for the new and tragic situation which has developed. It is bad enough that Catholics should be denied admission to houses allocated to them. It is bad that they should be goaded into a protest march. It is bad that this protest should be batoned and bludgeoned, as have others before it. But it is infinitely worse that, in the repression, the British Army and the UDA should be seen shoulder to shoulder. If the end of the IRA truce is tragic, it is also understandable. Yesterday's provocation was more than Northern Catholic flesh and blood could stand."

Protestant clergymen met with leaders of the Republican movement in December 1974, and their initiative resulted in an uneasy truce lasting from February 1975 to February 1976. In peace talks, British politicians held out the promise of a declaration of intent to withdraw and released some of those interned without trial, giving the impression that internment was going to be phased out. In reality, they had already laid the groundwork for the continuation of the policy of disposing of "unwanted members of the public." The use of Diplock Courts gave the system the appearance of respectability before the court of world opinion. The talks and cease-fire ended in February 1976 with the announcement that special category status, previously granted, was to be denied all "convicted" after March 1, 1976.
This denial led to the H-Block impasse and eventually to hunger strikes. British governments have demonstrated time and time again that they are not interested in a just solution to the Irish problem. The road to peace will begin with a public declaration of their intent to withdraw.
Meurig Parri's Statement

Excerpts of a statement made by Meurig Parri, former officer in the British Army, during a New Jersey interview, April 1981.

"I was in the Army for ten years in total, the last five of which, from 1967 onwards, were as a commissioned officer in the RAF Regiment, which is an infantry regiment. It, under certain circumstances, works closely with the RAF, but in Northern Ireland works as an ordinary infantry regiment under Army command...

The role of the Army, as I said, was to keep the peace, so they felt, between the two communities. But you had a situation in Northern Ireland in that period where the Nationalist community was suffering really quite enormous deprivation in political, economic, housing, many other terms. The only way the Nationalist population had of challenging its disadvantages was by direct action, in some cases, violent action, against the status quo. Well, of course, the Army, whose job it was to keep the peace, soon found themselves in direct conflict with these aspirations of the Nationalist community. And so, over a period of nearly a few months really, the Army, inadvertently and naively, and I think unwillingly, found its previous relationship with the Nationalist community quickly became very sour. The Nationalist community felt that the Army was stifling their ambitions, their justified ambitions, and the Nationalist community became the enemy of the British Army...

The patrols into Nationalist areas became very aggressive indeed. Far more foot patrols, constant foot patrols, a lot of harassment of people in the streets, picking a few people up, questioning, searches, all that razzmatazz...I think it was about the end of 1970 the Army, recognizing that although it was not a war, they actually had a formal enemy in Northern Ireland, the Nationalist population, started issuing war medals to troops who had served there, the General Service Medal being the main one, and they gave me one...But later on, by late 1970, the training that was given to the troops was a recognition that they were moving into a war situation...

Over the past 20 or 30 years, the British Army has fought more colonial wars than any other country there is. They have lost them all, but that is beside the point, they have a lot of experience...But in Northern Ireland, for the first time, the situation was very different. The troops there fighting a colonial war against the Nationalist population, discovered that the people they were fighting against were the same color as themselves, they spoke the same language as themselves, they
lived in streets in Belfast or Derry which were identical in all respects to the streets of Cardiff or Sheffield or wherever the troops came from. The troops actually started to identify with the enemy... The effect of this on Army morale was absolutely catastrophic. It is hard to estimate the effect on morale. The number of desertions from the Army, the number of people who wanted to buy themselves out, the general sort of depression that sets in, was really hard to cope with... The troops were being influenced by the Nationalist section of the population and were becoming very favorably inclined towards Irish Republicanism themselves. Again, lots of troops deserted, they wanted out, they didn’t want to have any part whatsoever in this particular war. Really, this is what happened to me, I suppose... I found that the more often I went to Ireland, the more disillusioned I was becoming with the Army’s role and the more I was becoming convinced that the only people that really had a right to be involved in the conflict in Northern Ireland were the Irish people themselves... But in early 1972, Bloody Sunday occurred.

Well, this was a premeditated thing. For two weeks before Bloody Sunday occurred, everybody in the Army knew that something big was due to happen. The feeling was that the security services, as they called them, a silly term used by the British forces, were being too soft, they were not coping with the war situation. It was getting beyond them and that something big, some kind of lesson had to be taught to the Nationalist population to solve this problem. Of course, on Bloody Sunday the Paras went into Derry and they slaughtered a lot of unarmed people. But this was actually shocking to a lot of soldiers...

When Bloody Sunday happened, there was a great deal of revulsion in the Army, and people left. I decided after Bloody Sunday that I must leave myself... I think I could say without any shadow of a doubt at all that the majority opinion amongst the junior ranks within the Army, the ordinary troops, a lot of the junior officers as well, is that they have no role whatsoever to play in Ireland... Why on earth should you lay your life on the line when you don’t know what you are doing it for?

I mean, to its own Army, the government is saying you are fighting a war in Northern Ireland, so get at it and sort these people out. But the British government is obviously saying to the Americans and people all over the world that this is not a war at all. What they are saying is that the British Army is doing a wonderful job sorting out a few criminals, a few terrorists, who
are sort of making life terrible for the vast majority of peaceful, law-abiding citizens. And these criminals must be rooted out and then punished very severely. That is what I think the British government is telling the people outside the Army. But that is a total travesty of the truth.

In Northern Ireland there is a war situation by any sensible definition of the term. The British Army has adopted a full war posture in Northern Ireland, its troops are in armed barracks, the troops are not allowed to mix with local population, the troops are not allowed to go out unless they are armed, these are all factors which apply to a war situation and the fact that war medals are awarded in Ireland now. They are fighting a war against another armed force, which are the various armed republican groups. Well, if you go to war in Ireland, and I think all the evidence points to the fact that you do have a war, you have a colonial war, and when people are captured in that war, they then become prisoners of war, by any logical thought process at all. But logical thought processes don't seem to be applying to the British government. They have decided in their wisdom that once somebody is captured in the Northern Ireland war, he or she suddenly ceases to be concerned with the war, ceases to be a prisoner of war, and becomes a common criminal and is liable to be treated with all the trouble, with all the problems that a common criminal has. And, thus, people are going on the blanket, they are going on hunger strike, they are protesting against the criminal status which has been forced upon them when they are not criminals at all, they are prisoners of war.

Well, the British government can't have it both ways. If it is a war, and the British government says to its Army that it is a war, then the people captured are prisoners of war, and they must be treated as prisoners of war and given the full rights and privileges accorded to prisoners of war. If, on the other hand, it is not a war, as the government says to the Americans, but it is a problem of rooting out criminals, well, if it's not a war, why have an Army there at all. You don't need armies, except to fight wars. The whole thing is ludicrous and is a total misrepresentation by the British government.

In those early days, in 1969 through 1970, there were a lot of very good people in the Army. I think they were misguided in some ways. But they were good people, they were genuine people, humanity used to figure in their considerations. And they were the people I used to mix with, because I would like to
think that humanity has always figured in my considerations. But all these people have now left...they just couldn’t take the kind of role which the Army was now being asked to perform.

The latest poll in England shows that apparently 57% of the population wish the troops to be withdrawn. The latest opinion poll in Wales, which was about four months ago, shows that over 80% of the population want the troops to be withdrawn. This is probably accurate because Wales in itself has a strong nationalist streak in its make-up. The British government is doing nothing in this matter. It hasn’t got the support of the people it is supposed to be governing behind it, it hasn’t got the support of the Army behind it, not of the lower ranks, and they are the people after all who have to do the dirty work, and from I have been able to detect since I’ve been in the States, it hasn’t got the support of thinking American people either...

The British government makes a lot of capital out of giving the impression that what is happening in Northern Ireland is a religious war. Protestants versus Catholics. They give this impression around the world and a lot of people are fooled by this. But this is simply not true. It is a fact that most Nationalists, most Republicans, are Catholic. It is a fact that most Unionists — by some strange quirk they are sometimes called Loyalists — are Protestant. But this is not invariably so at all. There are very substantial minorities of Protestants who support the Republican cause, and apparently there are very large numbers of Catholics who support the Unionist cause. The reason why the British government persists with the myth that the whole thing is a religious war, instead of a colonial war which is what it is, is that the British government simply doesn’t want the world to know it is a colonialist war...

I have no religious views at all. Within the Army there is no conception of religious matters really. Most regiments have a mixture, I imagine, of Catholics, Protestants, Hindus, Moslems. There is everything in there, and many people have no religious views at all. In fact, this raises an interesting point. There is a lot of antagonism between the Army and the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It is probably true to say that the British Army in Northern Ireland has failed to win this war in some measure because of the lack of cooperation between themselves and the police. One of the reasons for that lack of cooperation is that the ordinary soldiers are really quite disgusted at the blatant religious sectarianism of the police. The RUC, almost exclusively Protestant, makes no bones about the fact that they hate
Catholics. They show great discrimination in favor of Protestants. If there is a person who is suspected of a crime, it is very important to the police whether that person is Protestant or Catholic. If he is Catholic, the chances are a dozen to one that he is going to be charged. If he is a Protestant, there is a very good chance that he won’t be charged at all. And it is true to say that most of the ordinary soldiers who have no real religious views at all, or maybe they have but they don’t show them in this way, are thoroughly quite disgusted by this attitude of the police, and that really does hinder cooperation in every way...

When I left the Army in 1973, I was given two warnings. One was a formal, official warning, and the other was an informal warning. The formal warning I was given was that if I disclosed any information that I acquired during my career, especially information which was detrimental or the government would regard as detrimental to its interests, then I would be liable for prosecution under the Official Secrets Act. In the States I don’t think you have this kind of legislation at all. But the British government has an Act of Parliament, a law, which prohibits any member of the Armed Forces from disclosing anything about what happened to them while they were in the Armed Forces. And if they do disclose anything, then they are liable for prosecution and can go to prison for life for so doing. Of course, normally this Act is not applied. People just talk about small things in an unpretentious way. But when people use the information they gained in the service to try to discredit the arguments which the government is putting out, then this Act has been used, and will be used again, and I am very, very worried that it could be used against me.

The other type of warning I was given was an informal warning. The people who remain in the Army, because the good ones leave, the people who remain tend to be, in some cases, thugs, thugs in uniform. It is safer to be a thug in uniform than to be a thug out of uniform. They tend to be the hard men of this world, and I was warned by some people in the Army when I left that if I didn’t keep my mouth shut, then I was likely to be turned over physically. But that’s a long time ago now, I suppose, and perhaps the potency of those two particular threats worries me less.

But what does worry me very much indeed is that the political situation in the countries of Britain at the moment is becoming very, very tense indeed. The government is hated by the ordinary working population. There has been a number of instances over the last couple of years in Wales, where I live,
especially, where the authority of the government has been challenged very seriously and the government has not been convinced of its ability to withstand that challenge in the cases I am talking about. In fact, the government has given way and agreed to the concessions being demanded. But in consequence of the nervousness of the government because of these things, the degree of harassment of people who disagree with government policies, such things as the interception of mail, the tapping of telephones, the use of the Special Branch, which I think is equivalent to your FBI possibly, in surveillance of people and general interruption of activities, was greatly increased. And I am worried that my views, which I am prepared to publicly express, about the Irish situation and the views of other soldiers, who are also prepared to stand up and be counted on this issue, could well cause the British government to instigate some kind of reprisals. We have seen in Northern Ireland that reprisals are used very, very frequently by government forces. When they can't get some sort of evidence against people, they use unofficial means of punishing them for their transgressions and it would not surprise me, although I hope above hope that it doesn't happen, that the British government resorts to equally illegal methods outside of Northern Ireland, as well. It could well happen...

I am really heartened because I believe that this trip and, hopefully, other trips by other ex-soldiers in the future coming from the new Committee (Northern Ireland Veterans' Association) will be very fruitful, indeed. It is an interesting fact, the Thatcher government, the Tory government in Britain at the moment, has very, very few friends. Amongst its own population, it is detested, and around the world it is viewed with great suspicion, and the Tory government looks to the U.S.A. as its main ally. If criticism of the Tory government policy or English government policy in Ireland comes from the U.S.A., then the British government will be very, very worried indeed. On this trip I have been fortunate to meet some Congressmen down on Capitol Hill in Washington and they assure me that steps are being taken to mobilize opinion on Capitol Hill, to exert pressure on the British government to modify its policies in Northern Ireland. That pressure can only be good and is liable to be very effective. If ordinary American people are also stimulated to write to their Congressman, write to the British Embassy, write to Prime Minister Thatcher in London, many, many things like this, then this will have an enormous effect and could well bring forward the day when justice is finally achieved in Ireland.”
In the light of Meurig Parri’s remarks about the tense situation in parts of Britain at present, the following passage from Brigadier Frank Kitson’s book, *Low Intensity Operations*, is of interest. It would appear that he regarded army operations in Ireland as a means of training the army for similar operations in the United Kingdom:

"The uncertainty of the situation so far ahead as the second half of the 1970’s is just as marked in relation to events which are not directly connected with Britain’s position in Europe, and SEATO, CENTO and NATO could all change their form radically over a period of ten years. But one commitment will inevitably remain, which is the obligation for maintaining law and order within the United Kingdom. Recent events in Northern Ireland serve as a timely reminder that this cannot be taken for granted, and in the historical context it may be of interest to recall that when the regular army was first raised in the seventeenth century, ‘Suppression of the Irish’ was coupled with ‘Defense of the Protestant Religion’ as one of the two main reasons for its existence. In practice, the fact that the army is so heavily engaged in Ireland now makes it unlikely that it will be involved in *exactly this task* between 1975 and 1980 because it is reasonable to hope that the present emergency will be resolved within five years. Even so, there are other potential trouble spots within the United Kingdom which might involve the army in operations of a sort against political extremists who are prepared to resort to a considerable degree of violence to achieve their ends. It is difficult for the British with their traditions of stability to imagine disorders arising beyond the powers of the police to handle, but already there are indications that such a situation could arise, and this at a time of apparently unrivalled affluence. It has to be recognized that methods of tying down large numbers of policemen and soldiers have been developed for use against governments which rely on popular support and which cannot therefore afford to use the sort of ruthless brutality which a dictatorship could use in order to control the situation in an economic way. If a genuine and serious grievance arose, such as might result from a significant drop in the standard of living, all those who now dissipate their protest over a wide variety of causes might concentrate their efforts and produce a situation which was beyond the power of the police to handle. Should this happen, the army would be required to restore the position rapidly. Fumbling at this juncture might have grave consequences even to the extent of undermining confidence in the whole system of government."
This pamphlet was published in an effort to get the truth about events in Ireland to the people of America. There are terrorists in Ireland. They are in the British Army, the Royal Ulster Constabulary, and in loyalist paramilitary organizations. We believe that an honest examination of the facts will convince all that the terrorists are those dressed in British uniforms, and not the freedom fighters of the Irish Republican Army. We appeal to all in the United States of America who believe in the ideal of liberty and justice for all to give moral support to the men and women active in the Republican Movement in Ireland.

We close with excerpts from the address of Fr. Raymond Murray before the Ad Hoc Congressional Committee for Irish Affairs on October 12, 1978:

"I wish to draw your attention to the sufferings that have been endured over the past seven years by a group of up to 5,000 men and women who have been imprisoned in the North of Ireland. All of them come from the poor areas of Northern Ireland. The vast majority of them are Catholic. They are the Irish poor, and they have suffered grave violations of human rights. Many of them are the third and fourth generation of unemployment contrived by sectarian British Governments and bigoted Unionist Administrations. They have suffered internment, torture and the shanty-town prison huts of Long Kesh with its sewer-type H-Block. They have suffered the full rigour of emergency laws and special courts, maximum sentences. Against this wholesale arrest and imprisonment of young Irishmen we must set the astonishing fact that in the ten-year period 1968-1978, no British soldier or policeman in Northern Ireland has served a single day in jail for shooting dead sixty innocent people, torturing eight hundred people, using inhuman and degrading treatment on arrested persons."

"The United States Government has shown itself gravely concerned about human rights in Russia, Haiti, Sierra Leone, South Africa. We in Ireland find it difficult to understand why a President and his Congress refuse to make a clear and explicit statement condemning the well-documented and well-proven violations of human rights in Northern Ireland over the last seven years. Have the Americans got some inferiority complex in regard to the British? Is the British influence in America so strong that it can pressure the freedom-loving Americans to ignore the catalogue of torture? It is my opinion that the Irish people are not sufficiently united in speaking out with one voice for human rights for Irish people and for other people. We are a small race in the world compared to Arabs, Indians, Japanese, Chinese. We are sufficiently small to regard ourselves as a
family weakens itself by showing division if it fails to speak up for its members who are in need or who are experiencing violations of their basic human rights. What we want is to have the Irish in Ireland, the Irish in Britain, and the Irish in the United States of America — all thirty million of them — speaking with one united voice for human rights in Ireland and in the world.”


Transcript of Meurig Parri television interview courtesy of Patricia A. Gibbons.

The facts about:

*The British Army in Ireland*

*The Irish Republican Army*

with corroborative testimony by a former *British Army officer* who served in occupied Ireland.