

Friday August 6 1999

news special 19



IN the summer of 1969 the non-violent civil rights movement in Derry was continually frustrated by government bans on marches. When the Apprentice Boys' Relief of Derry march was then given the go-ahead and escorted through the city centre by RUC men, many Bogside residents felt resentment at this further manifestation of discrimination. The next 48 hours would see the city plunged into anarchy as pitched battles raged in the streets and the British army arrived in force. Former bishop of Derry, Dr Edward Daly, recalls those dark days and the sad death of the non-violent civil rights movement...

At one stage shots were fired from the RUC ranks. A man was hit by gunfire close to where I was standing. It was the first time I experienced gunfire in the streets

Bishop Daly



Police shelter behind riot shields from a barrage of missiles in William Street.



A water cannon is used to put out a blaze in the riot centre.

THE AGONY OF DERRY

Strabane R.U.C. under siege

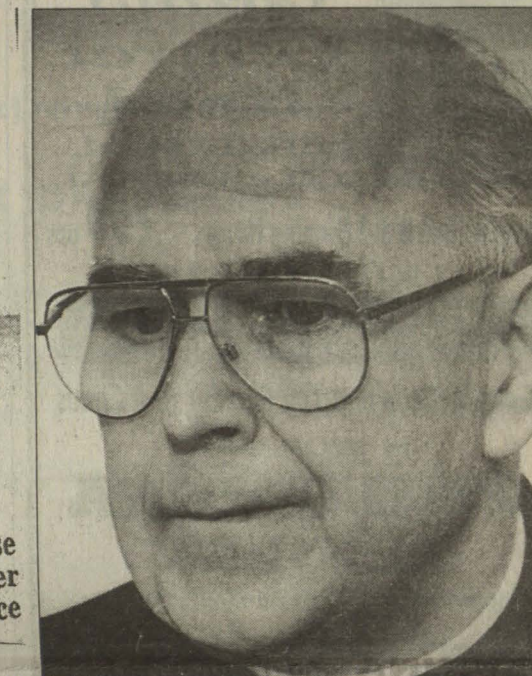
Westminster must now act—Miss Devlin and Eamonn McCann

TWO MEN SHOT AND WOUNDED

Police use tear-gas in Bogside after 8 hours of street clashes and baton charges

MISS BERNADETTE DEVLIN and Civil Rights leader, Mr. Eamonn McCann issued the following statement last night. "The fact which has taken place in Derry today, and about 400 people took part in the resulting violence in other areas of Northern Ireland, show that Northern Ireland is unworkable under the present system. The only way forward is a united Ireland."

POLICE USED TEAR GAS late last night in battle-torn Derry to disperse demonstrators in the Catholic Bogside area. The decision came after 8 hours of street clashes and baton charges by the police



FRONT PAGE NEWS... the battle of the Bogside (top) signalled an end to peaceful protest in Derry. (Bottom) Dr Edward Daly was a priest at St Eugene's Cathedral at the time

Anger and fear grip the streets

A city's people torn apart by state discrimination



THE morning of Tuesday August 12 1969 was warm and sunny. The sound of beating drums and swirling pipes was all pervasive. It was the day of the annual Apprentice Boys march to celebrate the Relief of Derry.

I was curate in St Eugene's Cathedral parish in Derry at that time. I ministered in the Bogside area of that parish. During the weeks before the march, there had been increasing tension in the city. Samuel Devenney had died in July. He had been a victim of a vicious beating in his own home at the hands of the RUC.

The Stormont government had banned dozens of civil rights marches in the previous nine months. And now this march, escorted by hundreds of RUC officers, was being permitted to take place through the city centre. There was considerable resentment at this further manifestation of discrimination. However, nobody could have anticipated the magnitude or intensity of the events that were to engulf the city in the next 48 hours. Things were calm but tense that Tuesday morning.

The first violent confrontations took place in the mid-afternoon, at the corner of William Street and Waterloo Place, as the march was passing that area. A large group of local young people had gathered to protest against the march and mutual jeering developed into cat-calling and stone-throwing.

John Hume and Eddie McAteer, priests and other community leaders, endeavoured to calm the young people but without much

success. The two opposing factions persisted in stone-throwing and exchanging insults. From time-to-time, the police engaged in baton charges. The crowds became bigger. Petrol bombs were thrown. At that time, redevelopment was taking place in the Bogside. There were large quantities of building materials everywhere, scaffolding poles, concrete blocks, and timber. Barricades were built from these and other materials across entrances to the Bogside.

About 7 or 7.30 in the evening, a significant event occurred. A large number of RUC officers, followed by a group of civilians, charged into the Bogside along Abbey Street. The civilians threw stones and broke windows in houses. Two of my senior colleagues, Father Benny O'Neill and the late Father Tony Mulvey, protested to the senior RUC officer on the street about this and having been ignored by him went to Victoria Barracks to lodge a formal complaint.

Residents became very frightened at this stage. Many of the elderly and mothers with young children wanted to get out of the area as quickly as possible. With others I assisted in this evacuation. We first transported the people to the cathedral grounds which served as an assembly area and from there brought them to relatives in quieter areas of town or arranged alternative accommodation from there. In the late evening, fierce rioting broke out. Hundreds of petrol bombs were thrown. And, for the first time, CS gas was used by the RUC.

The use of this vile and noxious substance caused tremendous panic, especially among many of the elderly who had opted to remain in the area. They had to be evacuated. The parochial house was packed with people. In the course of that terrible night, several large buildings caught fire accidentally or were deliberately set alight.

The rioting continued with a ferocious intensity until six o'clock in the morning. Few people got any sleep.

Looking back over the years, various events of those harrowing few days stand out clearly in my mind. The sequence or precise order of those events is more difficult to recall. I remember the famous 'heavy-duty' catapult constructed of scaffolding poles that was erected on the roof of the Rossville Flats, 10 storeys high. This projected petrol bombs and other missiles over a long distance but not with the greatest accuracy.

Bernadette Devlin was everywhere. There was a huge media presence. I remember standing to listen to Jack Lynch's broadcast on a car radio in Wellington Street, with a large number of others, on the Wednesday

night and being convinced that the Irish army was about to enter Derry. Later that night, it was widely believed that St Eugene's cathedral was about to be attacked.

A group of loyalists accompanied by the RUC were seen in Great James Street. Large crowds of local people subsequently assembled in the streets around the cathedral. At one stage shots were fired from the RUC ranks. A man was hit by gunfire close to where I was standing. It was the first time I experienced gunfire in the streets. With others, I helped to bring the wounded man to a sweet shop, Kandy Korner, which had been commandeered as a first aid post and staffed by doctors and nurses. Rioting continued throughout Wednesday night and once again few people got to bed.

On the Thursday morning, the disturbances continued sporadically. There were sectarian confrontations in the Fountain Street/Bishop Street area where a number of Catholic homes were set alight. Then there were radio reports that the B Specials were being sent in and this further poisoned the atmosphere.

As ever, rumours were rife and when it was suddenly reported that the British army were coming in, it was not believed at first.

However, in the late evening, they were in Waterloo Place erecting barbed wire barricades, with their steel helmets and their guns just like in world war two movies. I remember Eddie McAteer and Paddy (Bogside) Doherty speaking to the crowds and successfully persuading them to disperse and return home.

The area was a mess. The streets were strewn with stones and carpeted with glass and all kinds of debris and blocked by barricades. Many buildings still smouldered. The smell of burning and CS gas was everywhere. People wandered around William Street dazed and bewildered by the experience of the previous 48 hours. The destruction was widespread. Many individuals and families were homeless. Places of employment and business, including major landmarks in the area, had been destroyed.

The pent up anger, which had been building up in the nationalist people of Derry during 50 years of injustice, had been unleashed.

It was a community uprising. Some people were terrified. Some experienced exhilaration. All were exhausted. Sadly the non-violent civil rights movement was dead.



UGLY SCENES... RUC officers and civilians repel locals on Rossville Street as the battle of the Bogside rages (top). An army cordon (bottom) lets residents in and out of the Bogside after a night of rioting in which five people were shot dead

AUGUST 1969

4-PAGE SPECIAL FEATURE

Monday 9th August

ONLY IN THE IRISH NEWS

— ORDER YOUR COPY TODAY —