

ARMED STRUGGLE & TRADE UNIONISM

Peter Cassells, the former General Secretary of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, in his claim that the IRA campaign in the north was not justified (Letters, *Irish Independent*, May 29th), recalls the advice of the great liberator and emancipator, Daniel O'Connell who wrote: "Freedom is best attained not by the effusion of blood, but by the constitutional combination of good and wise men." In 1968, during the civil rights marches in the north, the "constitutional combination of good and wise men", in the form of John Hume, Ivan Cooper, Gerry Fitt and Austin Curry, was seeking equal rights and status within the northern statelet - full 'British' (aka 'human') rights within a British-run statelet, but were attacked by the RUC, 'B' Specials and mobs of Paisleyites.

If, at that juncture, unionism had responded to reasonable demands from reasonable people, this island may well have been spared the horrors of the following thirty years. Since the foundation of the northern statelet, patronage in every facet of life was endemic and the sole preserve of unionists. Even when Prime Ministers Capt Terence O'Neill, Major Chichester Clark and Brian Faulkner attempted to introduce mild legislative change, they were dumped.



Had unionism acted with a modicum of common sense and political integrity, the nightmare of the armed struggle might never have evolved. Rarely has a community acted more purposefully against its own interests than unionism. For half a century, Catholics were imprisoned in politically constructed ghettos, were denied equal access to jobs and housing and, to ensure the continuation of this odious policy, were denied the right to vote themselves out of their predicament.

The former General Secretary of ICTU also ignores the role played by sectarian trade unionists in the north, especially in Ballylumford Power Station, during the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council strike, which effectively brought NI to a standstill when the workforce at the plant joined the strike that resulted in the collapse of the Sunningdale Agreement. The collapse of Sunningdale emboldened sectarian loyalism and poisoned politics in Northern Ireland for a further generation, sullied the name of trade unionism and led to events like the Dublin and Monaghan bombings, Harryville Church protests, Holy Cross, and Drumcree.

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