

-Christmas on the Bogside

'It's war—and Faulkner declared it'

XMAS is a time when traditionally you're supposed to put your troubles behind you, or at least, in the well-worn words of the Catholic church, offer them up for the greater glory of God.

Religion in Ireland thrives on the poverty and poor conditions in which people find themselves. If people didn't have some hope of happiness in an after life, how could they bear to face the misery and hopelessness of their present lives?

It was Lenin who pointed out 'Religion is the opium of the people'. And it is the opiate that best serves the interests of British imperialism in dividing the working class in Ulster.

For many people this year, however, it will be difficult, in fact, impossible, to forget their problems. Families with sons, husbands and fathers interned will remember that the British army of occupation still occupies and that the bloody hand of British imperialism still threatens their homes.

ELIZABETH COLLINS is 28. Her husband Peter Paul Collins, 23, was arrested at his mother's home in Ramore Gardens in Creggan estate on August 9.

Elizabeth now lives in Creggan with her widowed mother-in-law, Mrs Joan Collins, and her husband's grandmother, Mrs Kathleen Collins.

Peter and Elizabeth were married in October 1969—two months after military occupation hit the Six Counties. She has one child 15 months old.

Since her husband was interned, Elizabeth has in all received a total of three weeks' Social Security benefit.

The reason for this, she says, is that her application for benefit was originally made from her own home in Donegal, Eire.

No money

'They are using that to hold the money off me. They have now asked me to see them twice a week but I still haven't received any money.'

'I waited every week expecting my money to be sent to me, but it never came. They don't care how you have to live.'

'I have had to borrow money from my mother, who is an old-age pensioner in Donegal, and from my husband's mother and grandmother.'

Money is very tight all round, since every trip to Long Kesh means hiring a taxi and that costs £8 every time.

Elizabeth and her mother-in-law had just returned from a visit to Long Kesh when I interviewed them.

Mrs Joan Collins took up the story:

'It has now cost me £88 for 11 visits to the camp.'

No reasons

'I went to the National Assistance but they said I couldn't have my money back. I told them it was a lot of money to have to pay from my pension.'

'They told me I could only have a voucher for train.'

'In the end I was allowed £15.95 back out of the £88. That's all gone now and I've had to pay out again for three or four weeks now.'

'My pension is £6 a week plus 30p from the Social Security.'

'My mother-in-law and daughter-in-law are living in this house with me.'

'Internment,' said Elizabeth, 'has completely broken up the beginning of our marriage.'

'If you could see justice coming it would be easier. But from the very beginning I think internment was wrong. They had no reasons for suspecting Peter.'

'Now I am in a position where I take every day as it comes, I don't look to the future.'

'If I had four or five children I would be much more worse off. I feel sorry for those who are left with large families.'

'I have only one child myself but I find that hard to manage. The situation has worsened'



since internment. The men that are lifted are going to be bitter. If they hadn't been doing anything before they were interned they will certainly be doing something after.'

'What are conditions like at Long Kesh?'

'All we see is the front. My husband doesn't talk very much. He's in good spirits and says all the men are the same.'

'I feel resentment. They are Irishmen after all.'

'I think it's something that shouldn't happen in a country like this.'

'We're supposed to be living in a civilized world, but it is not civilized. If we heard about this elsewhere we would think it was terrible and we would think something like this couldn't happen here.'

'Conditions at Long Kesh,' said her mother-in-law, 'are bad.'

'There're the cases of scabies for a start. They haven't had clean blankets since August 9.'

'They used to be able to have

put his shoes and socks on.

'No matter what they do now they'll never break our spirit.'

'This crowd at Stormont are finished. The people have never been so united as they are today.'

'The only loyalty that Faulkner, Craig and Paisley have is to the money going into their pockets. There is no loyalty to the Queen.'

The cause

'If there was a 32-county Ireland tomorrow, Paisley and the others would run to Jack Lynch and get the best jobs going.'

'None of the Ulster Unionists wants anything changed. As I said the only loyalty they have is to their pockets.'

'The RUC and the B-specials started the trouble here three years ago.'

'But the British government is the cause of the trouble all along and they have the solution.'

'The British people are paying for this army through taxation to the teeth. They don't know because they have never been told about this.'



'The working class won't stand for it'

two clean sheets a week, now they're only allowed one.

'A while ago we brought up 100 hot water bottles and delph mugs but the army made us bring them all back.'

'The food is bad and the portions are very small.'

'She told me she had heard reports that every night the soldiers threw sticks and things at the tin huts to keep the men awake. Some of the men's eyes have been affected.'

Batoning

'She heard that the men were made to run over broken glass and stones on their bare feet.'

'When the army came here for Peter,' she told me, 'they banged the door in. I got hold of one of the soldiers and the other was threatening me with his baton.'

'My daughter went between the soldier and me and the other one batoned her in the stomach instead.'

'Then he ran upstairs and dragged Peter down. They wouldn't even give him time to

'There never was a Conservative government that was a friend of the Irish or English people.'

'Here in the North, Brian Faulkner declared war on the Catholics; what were we expected to do about it? We couldn't sit in our homes and let their thugs murder us.'

'If we give in now it will be another 50 years before we get the people together again.'

'To solve this situation we have to get the Protestant and Catholic people together again. Paisley separates the Protestants off.'

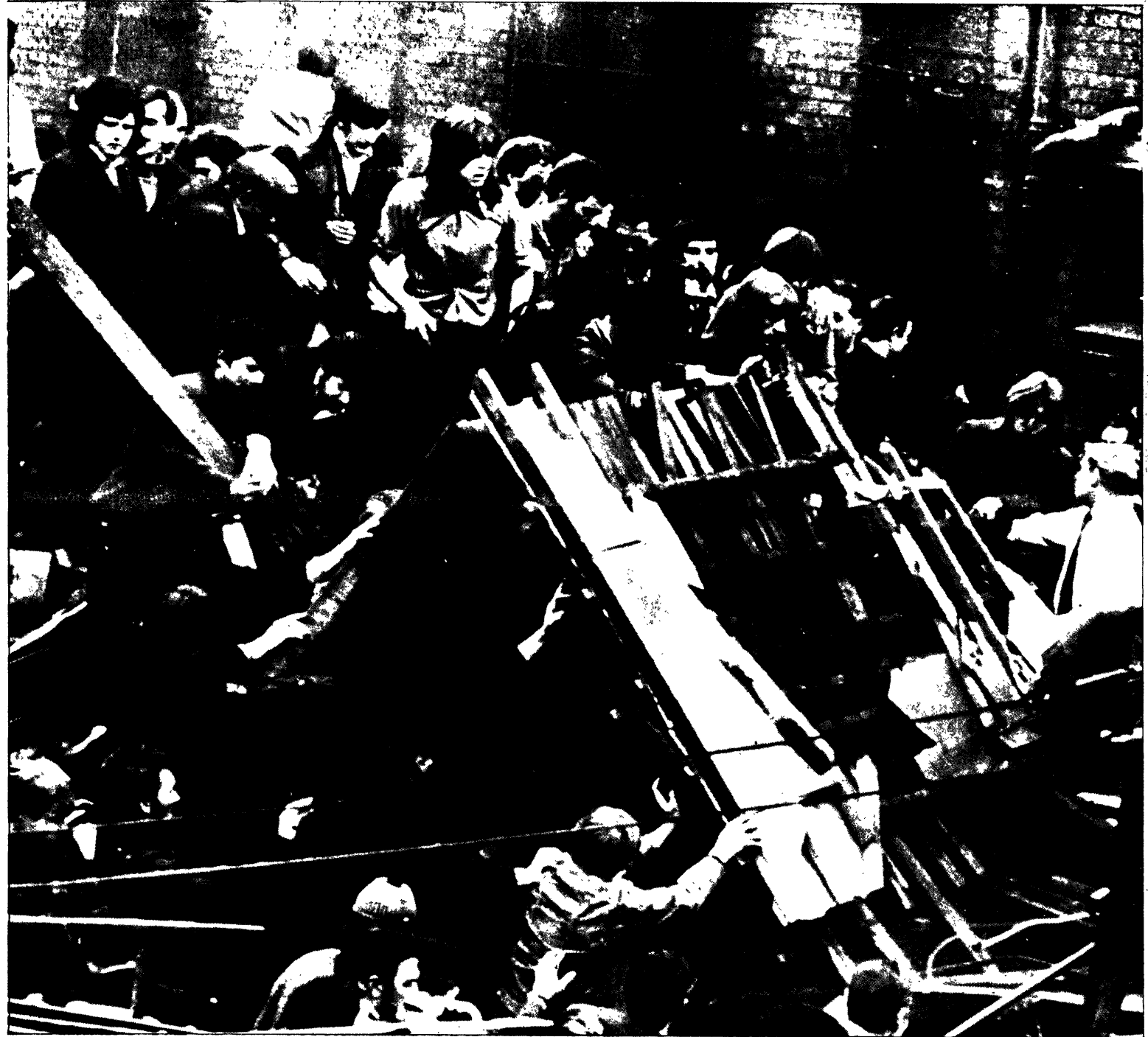
'They don't want peace. They want it on their terms. It's war—and Faulkner declared it.'

'They filled old-age pensioners' homes full of gas.'

'It was the terrorizing of homes that brought the men on the streets.'

'Stormont has to be dissolved and the British army withdrawn before there is peace.'

'If they do what they have done here in England the working class won't stand for it. There will be a revolution.'



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