

CATHOLIC COURIER

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Implacable Irish abide with conflict

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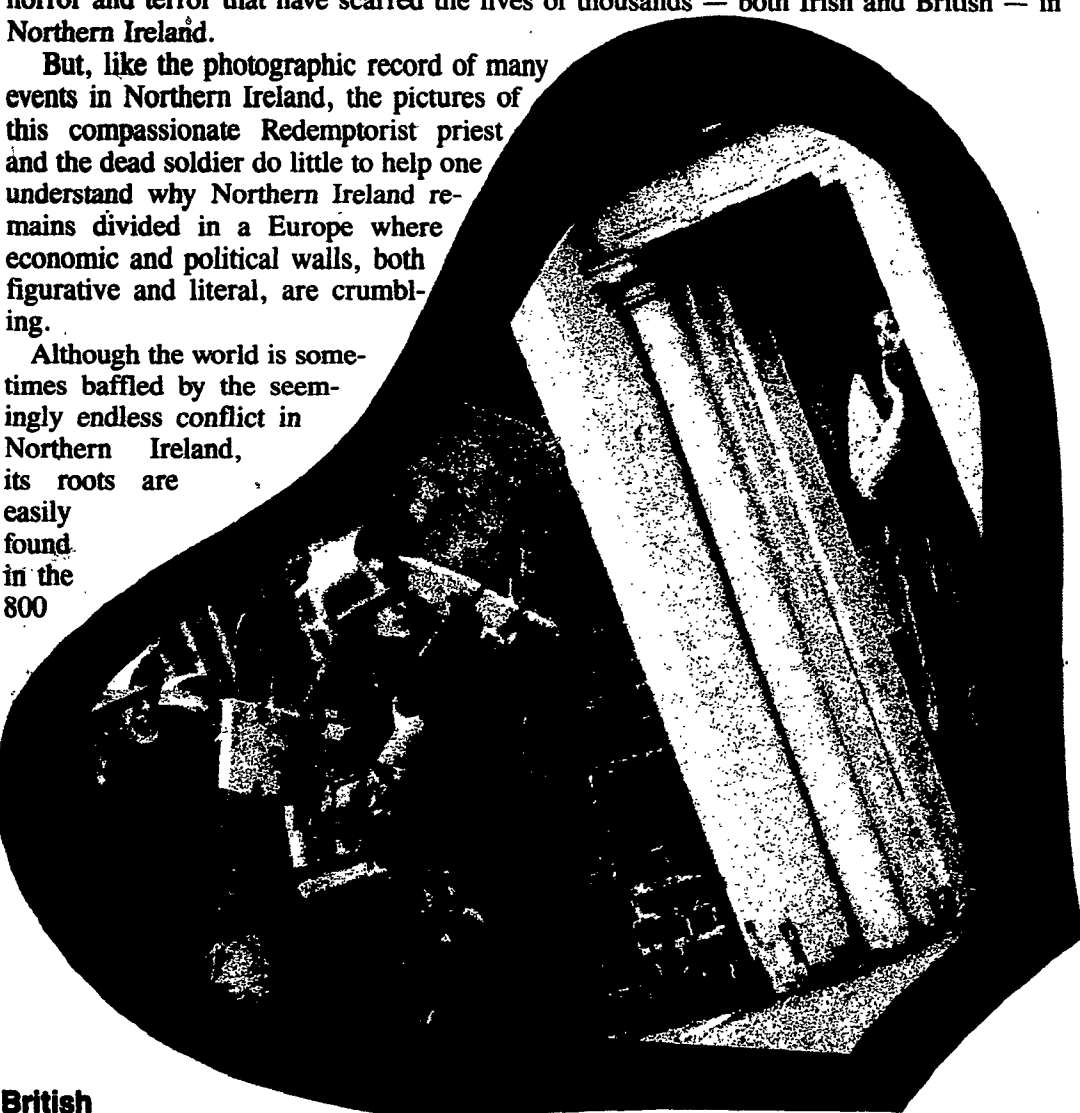
Over a bloody and battered naked man kneels Belfast's Father Alec Reid, looking off into the distance, his eyes filled with obvious sorrow.

The body he futilely tries to resurrect is that of an off-duty British soldier, attacked along with a fellow soldier only moments before by a mob of enraged mourners at the funeral of an Irish Republican Army member.

Pictures of this moment in 1988 were seen all over the world, once again spotlighting the horror and terror that have scarred the lives of thousands — both Irish and British — in Northern Ireland.

But, like the photographic record of many events in Northern Ireland, the pictures of this compassionate Redemptorist priest and the dead soldier do little to help one understand why Northern Ireland remains divided in a Europe where economic and political walls, both figurative and literal, are crumbling.

Although the world is sometimes baffled by the seemingly endless conflict in Northern Ireland, its roots are easily found in the 800



British troops returned to Northern Ireland in 1969 to fight the Provisional IRA.

years of British rule in Ireland, a rule that for good or ill has irrevocably shaped the fate and future of Northern Ireland.

Despite periods of English invasions and rule since 1170, Irish autonomy was not totally suppressed until the 17th century, when Scotch and British Protestants settled in the north of Ireland on lands confiscated from the Irish.

These "plantation" settlers were attacked by Irish rebels in 1641, and the savage and bloody revolt was ended ruthlessly by Oliver Cromwell in 1652. Under Cromwell, Catholics suffered grievously, and hence, when England's Catholic King James II loosened control over the Catholic Irish, they saw an ally in the monarch and joined with him to fight William of Orange, the Protestant English Parliament's chosen ruler, in the Battle of the Boyne in 1690.

To the dismay of the Catholic Irish — and to the joy of the Protestant settlers — James II was defeated, and English forces finished off his Irish allies over the next two years.

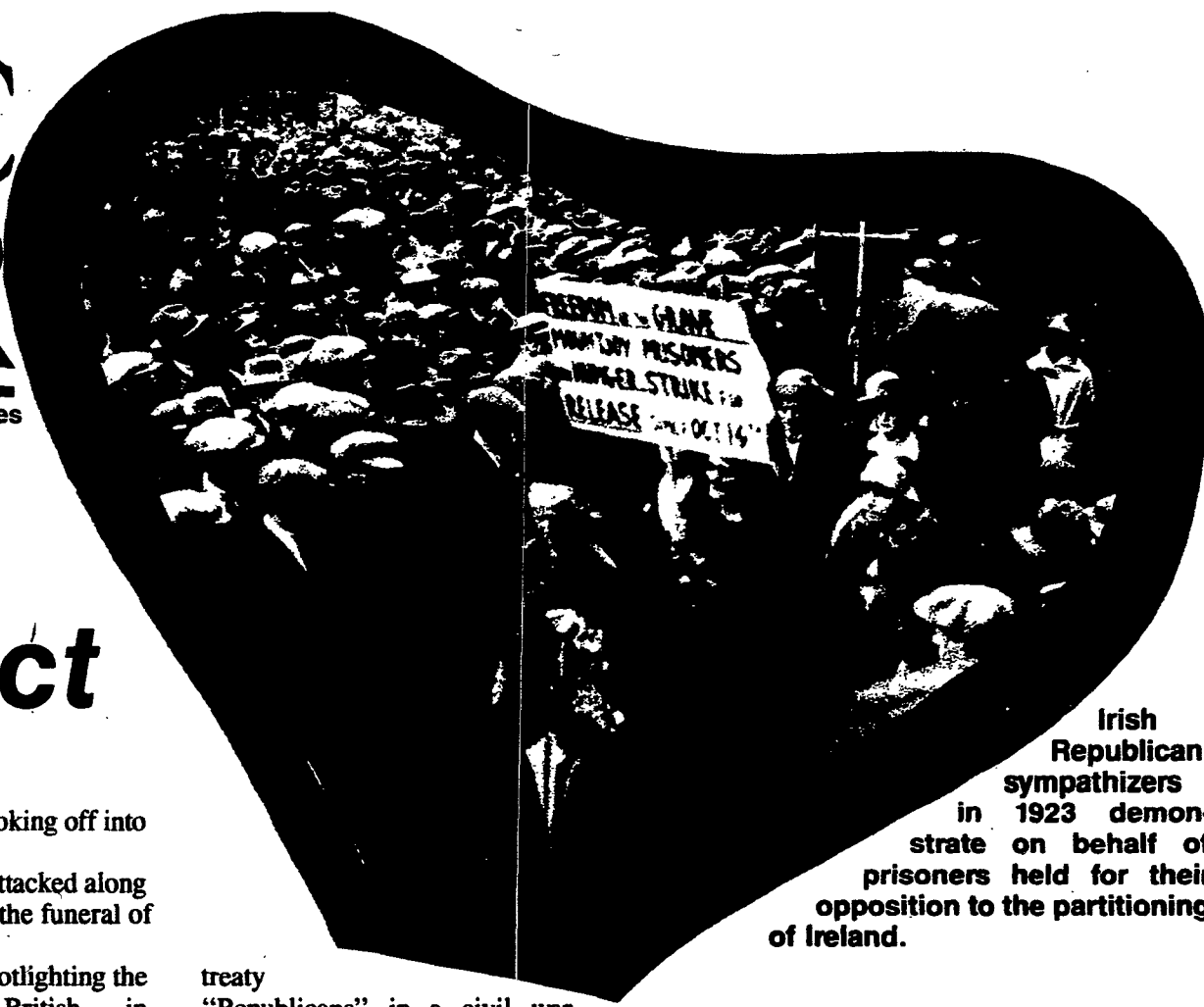
After 1690, Catholic Ireland suffered economic and religious persecution at the hands of its British rulers and their loyal settlers. Periodic revolts occurred, but ultimately failed and in 1801, the Act of Union of Great Britain and Ireland was forged. Irish resistance to the union — from both Catholics and Protestants — rose up throughout the 1800s in the form of peaceful parliamentarianism and violent revolt.

A home-rule bill for Ireland was introduced in the English Parliament in 1912. The bill was put on hold as World War I began, but Irish nationalists had not tabled their aspirations for independence. On Easter Monday, 1916, Irish rebels declared an independent Ireland and attacked British strongholds throughout the country.

Although the rebellion was crushed by British forces, the ruthlessness with which the rebels were treated aroused sympathy throughout Ireland and, in 1919, the nationalists' leading political party, Sinn Fein (Irish for "Ourselves Alone") declared an independent Irish republic whose supporters fought English forces.

The two sides signed a treaty in 1920, establishing an Irish Free State in 26 counties, with the six Protestant-dominated counties of Ulster remaining in the United Kingdom.

Many Irish nationalists opposed the partition of Ireland, and pro-treaty "Free Staters" fought anti-



Irish Republican sympathizers in 1923 demonstrate on behalf of prisoners held for their opposition to the partitioning of Ireland.

treaty

"Republicans" in a civil war until they were defeated in 1922. The 26 counties left the British commonwealth in 1948.

To this day, the government in the south is viewed with contempt by many nationalists in the north, who see Dublin — which cooperates with Britain in border surveillance of the IRA — as part of their problem, not part of the solution. Jack Bradigan-Spula, director of the Rochester Peace and Justice Education Center, noted such feelings in an article he wrote on Ireland for *City*, a Rochester newspaper, in 1989.

"Caoimhghin O Caolain, a Sinn Fein councillor, remarks to us — with obvious disdain for collaborators — that 'the Free State Army has never fired on anyone else except Republicans,'" Bradigan-Spula wrote.

Discrimination, harassment and terror was the lot of the nationalist population in Northern Ireland throughout the post-treaty years as the unionists solidified their rule through gerrymandering and employment discrimination against the Catholic population.

In the early 1960s, however, the unionist-dominated government began showing signs that it might want to accommodate nationalists in certain areas, inspiring a non-violent Catholic civil-rights movement.

The civil-rights movement was destroyed by police attacks and loyalist opposition. At one famous demonstration in Derry, Royal Ulster Constabulary officials attacked Catholic civil rights workers marching over a bridge.

"The police just went mad," one witness told Legs McNeil in a 1988 article for *Spin* magazine. "They moved in on all four sides with truncheons and heels and boots and beat everybody off the street."

By 1969, riots between the two opposing communities in Northern Ireland compelled the Northern Irish government to call in troops from England. Although initially welcomed by the besieged Catholic population, a series of what the British army has termed "blunders" and what the IRA has called "deliberate moves" resulted in the alienation of the nationalist population from the British army. The moves included thousands of house searches in Catholic neighborhoods and a policy of internment without trial against IRA suspects.

Out of the turmoil of the late 1960s and early 1970s arose the Provisional IRA, which split from the non-violent, Marxist-influenced Official IRA in 1969. Although U.S. press accounts routinely label the "Provos" as Marxists, the Provos' leaders have asserted they left the Official IRA in part because they considered it communist.

Since 1969, the IRA, the British forces and the RUC have fought a continuing war in the streets and towns of Northern Ireland. Protestant paramilitary groups as well as the nationalist organizations have engaged in bombings and shootings.

Generally, the world press has labeled the IRA a "terrorist" group, but nationalists point to alleged British and RUC torture and harassment of IRA prisoners — documented by such human rights groups as Amnesty International — as proof of terrorism on the

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A funeral cortege for a member of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, killed on patrol, makes its way out of Portrush, Northern Ireland. The conflict has claimed more than 2,705 lives since 1969.