

WEST BELFAST REMEMBERS POGROMS OF AUGUST 1969

Hundreds of members of the West Belfast community gathered on Sunday 16th August, for a march and rally to mark the 40th anniversary of the pogroms of August 1969.

The march began at Divis Street, where Hugh Mc Cabe and nine year old Patrick Rooney were murdered by the RUC on 15th August 1969.

It progressed up the Falls Road, passing Saint Comgall's Primary School which was attacked by Unionist mobs and courageously defended by a poorly armed but determined IRA.

It made its way through Conway Street and Cupar Street where homes were burnt out, before moving up Clonard Street past Clonard Monastery which was targeted by petrol bombs and saved only by the tremendous bravery of the young people of Clonard and the members of the men's confraternity.

The march ended in Clonard Gardens and Bombay Street which was completely destroyed in the burnings and where Fian Gerard Mc Auley was shot dead by loyalist while defending the area.

Emotions were raw among participants as the memories came flooding back like it was yesterday.

The orange state had sought to put an end to nationalist demands for basic civil rights, for decent housing and for one person one vote.

The state inflicted massive violence and suffering upon the nationalist people, but this time they fought back like never before. We said never again and meant it.

A 77 foot long mural with the portraits of all the 'C' Company Volunteers on the Roll of Honour was unveiled.

The commemoration garden was declared open and it was explained that there were three main commemorative plagues. The centre piece records all the Volunteers from 'C' company on the Roll of Honour alongside civilians from the Clonard area who were killed over the years by British forces and their loyalist murder gangs.

On the right side of the garden the plague perpetuates the memory of all deceased ex-pows from the area from 1916 until this present day, many of whom gave a life time of service to the Republican Movement.

Last but not least on the far side of the garden a plague acknowledges the essential role in our struggle played by our "unsung heroes" who, in their own quiet way, assisted over the years by opening their doors and their hearts to the IRA. Without their assistance our struggle would not have survived.

For your information this was not the first time this community had been subject to murder and terror as In July 1920, eight local residents were murdered by the British Army, including Brother Michael Morgan from Clonard Monastery. The rationale for the attacks in the 1920's was to coerce, intimidate and terrorise Nationalists into tolerating partition and the establishment of the "Orange state".

In 1969, the loyalist pogrom across Belfast was the Orange states response to our just demands for basic human civil rights, for housing and the right to vote.

During that time 8 people died, 750 were injured and 133 were treated for gunshot wounds. 1,505 nationalist families were driven from their homes through burning and intimidation. 179 homes and buildings were completely destroyed and almost 400 more were damaged.

In 1969 generations of young nationalists like me were not for lying down. Mindful of other inspirational events worldwide the pogroms were a major watershed in our lives.

This scenario motivated many young men and women to join the ranks of the IRA. We were united in our quest to provide an adequate defence for our communities. We were all rational people who weighed up the obvious risks involved, alongside the potential gains for our community. Republican tradition had taught us that there were only two possible destinations for an active Republican i.e. the prison cell or the grave, but our commitment to our people overcame our concerns and fears.

As I told you before I had the experience at 17 years of age of her Majesty's prison, but many of my comrades sadly gave the ultimate sacrifice with their lives.

Republicans have made a long and painful journey over the forty years of struggle, the sacrifices of many Volunteers and members of our community have brought us to where we are today. I feel that we must realize their dreams and aspirations but those dreams will only become a reality if we continue to apply ourselves to the task at hand.

Our vision is for a “United Ireland” and we must rise to meet the challenges ahead to bring about our freedom.

In the words of “Bobby Sands”

“OUR REVENGE WILL BE THE LAUGHTER OF OUR CHILDREN”.

Slan

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