

TOO LONG A SACRIFICE: LIFE AND DEATH IN NORTHERN IRELAND SINCE 1969

by Jack Holland

(Dodd, Mead & Co.; xvi + 217 pp., \$10.95)

Kevin Sullivan

"Divided states produce unusual families," Jack Holland writes. "I had the fortune to be part of one. It was unusual because, during a time when sectarian passions were virtually unchecked, a Catholic, Kate Murphy, my grandmother, married a Protestant, William Henry Holland, my grandfather. I lived with them...." And so did a number of others in that extended family, their religious differences fading to insignificance against the intimacy, reinforced by the poverty, of their daily lives. As a young man Holland escaped to university and later became an investigative reporter, a profession to which he brings not only the skills of a journalist but the balance and perspective of a historian, and even at times—quite unobtrusively—the touch of a poet. These are his people, the Protestant and Catholic poor in the ghettos of Northern Ireland, chiefly in Derry and Belfast, who have suffered most in the conflict that the British military, though not the British Government, has acknowledged is tantamount to a state of war. By grounding his survey of events in an understanding of both these people, by refusing to shuffle them into easy categories or depersonalize them into statistics, Holland puts the conflict—the muddle of history, the tangle of politics, the partisan stupidities on either side—into human and compassionate perspective. He does so with discipline, restraint, and a sense of order, moving forward and back between personal experience and public event with grace and assurance.

The struggle, as the world knows, is ancient—the oldest of its kind in the history of Western Europe. In its latest phase, what had started out twelve years ago as a civil rights demonstration has the character, though not the full proportions, of sustained guerrilla warfare. The general commanding officer of the British forces in Northern Ireland, Brigadier Glover, leaves no room

for doubt on this point. In an official, and once secret, report prepared in 1979 on the resources and political options of the IRA, he conceded: "The Provisional IRA (PIRA) has the dedication and sinews of war to raise violence intermittently to at least the level of 1978, certainly for the foreseeable future. Even if 'Peace' is restored, *the motivation for political inspired violence will remain.*"

In the words I have italicized Glover distinguishes, as his superiors apparently do not, between symptom and disease. Violence is the result, not the cause, of political instability in Northern Ireland. Officialdom continues to insist on the restoration of "law and order" as preliminary to a political solution. But events have now reached such a pass that law and order cannot be permanently restored until some way is found to undo the Act of Ireland (1920) by which a British Parliament carved an artificial mini-state out of six of the nine counties of Ulster—creating "a Protestant country," as the boast once ran, "and a Protestant parliament for a Protestant people." That parliament at Stormont is gone now, dismantled in 1972, when direct rule was imposed from Westminster. But nothing has yet been found to take its place, and into the political vacuum thus created Protestant and Catholic militants and paramilitaries have been moving with ominous assurance. To these extremists, the politician in Northern Ireland has become largely irrelevant, the politicians in London and Dublin ineffectual fumbler whom neither side can trust. In so volatile a situation there remains always the danger that the center may yet give way, that the Protestant and Catholic middle classes, no less than the working class, may be further polarized around either extreme.

Political initiative has been paralyzed in large part because of the intransigent and minatory stance of

that artificially created majority (Protestant and Unionist) in the six counties. They constitute a strange breed. Less than 2 per cent of the population of the United Kingdom, less than 20 per cent of the population of Ireland as a whole, they are in fact a *minority* when considered as part of either the British or an Irish polity. They seem to insist on a political identity of their own, but no clear definition can be found for that identity. They have been in Ireland for centuries and claim to be British. But the British in ordinary encounters treat them as Irish, which they resent; and the Irish, whom they ignore, cannot for the most part treat with them at all. No wonder that popular opinion in Britain and Ireland, which recent polls have shown substantially endorse a British withdrawal, leaves these people quite unmoved. Divided into a number of sects and political factions, they are united only in their common fear of absorption into the predominantly Catholic population of the other twenty-six counties of Ireland. If their influence on British and Irish affairs has been, as it still is, out of all proportion to their numbers, this is because they have succeeded in transforming their communal subjective fear into an object of intimidation—holding over both polities the threat of a bloody and ruinous "Protestant backlash."

It would be interesting to speculate on what might happen if, in the event of British disengagement, that threat were to be carried out. At worst, a civil war quickly spilling over into the Irish Republic with bloody consequences for all concerned. But what would the Unionists, or the more rational among them, hope to gain by such a conflict, even if the outcome were—an extreme possibility—victory for their side? Reestablishment of union with the United Kingdom, whose disposal of them had sparked the conflict? But if the Provisional IRA cannot bomb the British out of the island, it seems unlikely that the Unionists could bomb them back in. A takeover of the Irish Republic to the south? The absurdity of the question is its own answer. Well, what could they hope to gain? Nothing of practical value—and they are an eminently practical people. Is it possible, then, that the "Protestant backlash," the unleashing of violence on an as yet unprecedented scale in Ireland, is nothing more than a magnificent and effective bluff? That is

at least a possibility. But no British government yet has had the temerity to call the bluff.

Jack Holland does not speculate. He presents the record of events, many of them familiar to him since childhood, with a sympathy large enough to comprehend Protestant fears, Catholic frustration, and the British dilemma in the face of both. Violence and the threat of violence can only forestall a solution that, all reasonable men agree, depends on and demands political courage and flexibility—especially on the part of the British and Irish governments. A negotiated settlement, however arrived at, must, Holland suggests, entail a gradual devolution of union with the United Kingdom and the eventual reunification of the whole island of Ireland. The suggestion may not be unwelcome in some quarters not traditionally disposed to an impartial view of troubles in Ireland. In a tone far less restrained than Holland's, an English colleague, Paul Johnson, editor of *The Spectator* and a strong supporter of Mrs. Thatcher, has written: "In Ireland over the centuries we have tried every possible formula: direct rule, indirect rule, genocide, apartheid, puppet parliaments, real parliaments, martial law, civil law, colonization, land reform, partition. Nothing has worked. The only solution we have not tried is absolute and unconditional withdrawal."

Nothing in Holland's informed and balanced account of life and death in Northern Ireland contradicts that blunt English assessment of the matter.

THE INERTIA OF FEAR AND THE SCIENTIFIC WORLDVIEW

by Valentin Turchin

translated by Guy Daniels

(Columbia University Press, xviii + 300 pp., \$19.95)

David Paul Rebovich

As with the proverbial royal messenger, the fortune and fame of Soviet dissidents and defectors hinge on the news they bring. Often the effect is to dampen the celebration of freedom and trivialize the experience of persecution. Nonetheless, victimization by tyrannical regimes can be ennobling, and Americans have high regard for those who endure in the name of dignity, truth, and freedom. We are particularly

attracted to Soviet dissidents who represent literature, the arts, and science—those universal forms of expression and understanding that transcend national boundaries and that all civil people can claim as their own. Thus, Solzhenitsyn seems to belong in the West, the Soviets undeserving of his insights into the human spirit and passions. Baryshnikov and his dance, too, take on a new vitality here, his art freed from the constraints of an official national culture. Still, Solzhenitsyn's religious sentimentalism and Baryshnikov's "nouveau" life-style are both revealing and disappointing.

Valentin Turchin will not escape

similar criticism. "In America, you will be a dissident, too," a friend tells him, a pointed comment he cites to warn readers that his book may discomfort as well as enlighten. Turchin, a Russian physicist, computer scientist, student of cybernetics, and human rights activist, left the Soviet Union in 1977 following the publication and underground dissemination of this scathing attack on the Soviet Union. *The Inertia of Fear and the Scientific Worldview*, however, is about much more, and Turchin's ambitious scope is the most attractive and controversial aspect of this book. Turchin does more than give arms to anti-Soviet rhetoric. He



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