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The Impact of the Parachute Regiment in Belfast 1970-1973

By Micheál Smith

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Review by John Molyneux

With excellent timing this publication arrives just when collusion and state-sponsored murder has again come under the international spotlight and when new Garda Commissioner Drew Harris’s role in covering up that collusion (for example in the Miami Showband massacre) ought to be under much more scrutiny than it is.

The recent films *No Stone Unturned* and *Unquiet Graves* have exposed the activities of the notorious Glenanne gang, which comprised serving UDR and RUC officers. Members of this gang were responsible for up to 120 deaths, including at Loughinisland and in the Dublin and Monaghan bombings.

Now the activities of the Parachute Regiment have come under scrutiny. Two former Paratroopers have been charged in Belfast with the murder of Official IRA activist Joe McCann in 1972. And a new Channel 4 film,



The Ballymurphy Precedent, has exposed audiences across Britain to the killings of 11 civilians by the Paras at Ballymurphy, 6 months before many of the same troops killed 13 people on Bloody Sunday. A fresh Inquest recently began in the courts in Belfast into what has become known as the Ballymurphy Massacre.

This short but impactful book opens with an extract from David Cameron’s mealy-mouthed apology for Bloody Sunday in which he said that Bloody Sunday was not “the defining story of the service

the British Army gave in Northern Ireland”.

But it was. Bloody Sunday encapsulated the approach of the British army, and particularly the Paras, to Northern Ireland. The Paras were “shock troops renowned for their ferocious attitude to combat”, and coveted as “the Rottweiler of the British Army”, designed and employed to pacify uprisings and terrorise communities.

The book outlines a litany of deaths and abuses for which the Paras were responsible in Belfast from

1970-1973, the peak of the Paras' deployment there. The author uses contemporary sources, local community-based resources, and very often Paratroopers' own words to describe these, in sometimes shocking detail.

The book also details the Paras' massive, sustained assaults on the communities of Ballymurphy, Ardoyne and on the Shankill Road which resulted in multiple injuries and deaths, demonstrating that the Paras' violence was not reserved solely for one community.

But the key achievement of the book is to place the deployment of the Parachute Regiment in an international context. Smith explores how the Regiment was, after World War 2, "re-positioned as Britain's shock troops... at the heart of the violent upheavals as Britain's grip on its Empire was slipping".

These were colonial troops, a colonial army, and it treated the conflict in Northern Ireland as a colonial one. Accordingly, it used the same terror tactics as applied in previous colonial campaigns. Smith details how writers and researchers from across the former British Empire are beginning to uncover the secrets of Britain's dirty wars, particularly through the use of declassified documents as groups like the Pat Finucane Centre have done here.

Smith cites Caroline Elkins, a scholar of the colonial suppression of Kenya, who has described how the architects of British tactics, who positioned the Paras as the spearhead, moved from Malaysia to Kenya to Cyprus to Oman to Northern Ireland, acquiring strategic knowledge and adapting policies to local circumstances. They built a counterinsurgency program which touched "nearly every corner of the

world where Britain had imperial and strategic interests".

The book also explores how this closer examination of British colonial policy, led by those most affected by it, is forcing a critical reappraisal among historians and academics of recent British and U.S. military strategy in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Perhaps the most stunning details in the book come from the mouths of the Paras themselves. Their pride in their role, in their belief in their innate superiority and their exceptionalism among British troops, is reflected in their memoirs. These expose the brutality, very often the psychopathy, which is prized as a quality in the Parachute Regiment. They are, as one author describes, 'an elite, hermetic and intensely competitive corps', 'a world of complex and often violent ritual', which takes into its ranks only 'the most dedicated and aggressive'.

This is emphasised by the gruelling training and indoctrination they endure, which is likewise detailed here. Nevertheless, Smith allows space for one former Para to wonder whether "In any other circumstances my colleagues might have been quite ordinary: perfect gentlemen, good friends, loving husbands, gentle fathers". Smith asks did the Parachute Regiment create such killers out of young men who otherwise might have been 'perfect gentlemen, good friends, loving husbands, gentle fathers', or is it the selection of only 'the most dedicated and aggressive' which gives the Regiment its unique character? This document is intended to stand "as evidence of the appalling record of the Parachute Regiment in Belfast but also as testimony to the

tenacity and endurance of those largely working-class communities across Belfast who refused to be beaten down".

Smith has dedicated it to those whose loved ones were killed by soldiers of the Parachute Regiment and to all who were tortured, ill-treated and abused by 'The Paras', wherever they may be". As he shows, this includes people from across the globe and people who are impacted by the legacy of the Paras' example today.

Inequality and mental health

Wilkinson, Richard; Pickett, Kate. *The Inner Level: How More Equal Societies Reduce Stress, Restore Sanity and Improve Everyone's Wellbeing* (Penguin Books, 2018).

Review by Peadar O'Grady

'Medicine is a social science and politics is nothing else than medicine on a large scale.'
– Rudolf Virchow

■ This superb new book from public health professors, Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, follows on from the groundbreaking book *The Spirit Level* by the same authors in 2009. That book noted that it is well established that, in rich developed countries, many health and social problems have a social gradient, that is, they are more common the lower down the social scale of income or other measures of social status a person finds themselves. However, as the new book summarises well in its prologue, these problems are much more

common in more unequal societies ie those countries with larger differences in income and wealth between the rich and the poor: “We have known for decades that ill health, violence, child well-being, incarceration, mental illness, drug addiction and many other problems have social gradients...What *The Spirit Level* showed was in fact simple: that the many seemingly distinct problems which we know are related to social status... within our societies, get worse when bigger income differences make the status differences larger and more important...One of our more surprising findings was that inequality affects the vast majority of the population, not only a poor minority. Although its severest effects are on those nearer the bottom of the social ladder, the vast majority are also affected to a lesser extent...It is because inequality affects most people that the differences in rates of health and social problems between more and less equal societies are often very large indeed. We found that mental illness and infant mortality rates were two or three times as high in more unequal countries.” In their new book the authors develop the reasons why inequality might lead to mental health difficulties, such as anxiety, depression and schizophrenia, but also to increased consumption of commodities including prescribed and recreational psychoactive drugs: “Today we live in societies in which worries about how we are seen and judged by others – what psychologists call ‘the social evaluative threat’ – are one of the most serious burdens on the quality and experience of life in rich developed countries. The costs are measured not only in terms

of additional stress, anxiety and depression, but also in poorer physical health, in the frequent resort to drink and drugs we use to keep our anxieties at bay, and in the loss of friendly community life which leaves so many people feeling isolated and alone.” The book argues that in societies with a steeper gradient, the greater gap between rich and poor causes an increased threat of being judged and of judging others in a world of envy upwards and scorn downwards. This ‘social evaluative stress’ is powerful and often hidden because people are ashamed of it and tend to blame themselves and hide it. As well as causing anxiety and depression, people can react in the opposite direction and become boastful and narcissistic though it is important to discern between the bravado of the poor and the entitlement of the rich. Young people putting a brave face on it by insisting they are on top of things is a clearly different dynamic than the pretence of Trump to have strengths in economics, politics or common decency that he does not in fact possess. Focussing on possessions to improve our appearance of status leads to increasing wasteful and often health damaging consumption and addiction and ultimately fails to improve our feelings of anxiety or other mental health problems and usually only worsens them. In engaging in solutions the book is optimistic that despite the overwhelming trend towards inequality in the past 50 years it is possible for inequality to be reversed and for a sustainable answer to environmental threats, including global warming, also to be found. Their call for ‘Economic Democracy’ includes ‘predistribution’ changes: better

pay for the lowest paid and reduced incomes for the highest paid. Differences in pay between the top executive and the shop floor worker went from a range of 20-30 times higher in the 1970s to a range of 300-400 times today. Redistribution by taxation on high incomes and profits and public spending on services such as welfare payments, childcare, transport, education and health infrastructure, and so on, all improve the level of inequality in a more equal direction. ‘Economic Democracy’ would require more control of workplaces by employees through incentives for cooperatives and other types of employee ownership schemes. However the exploration of the considerable task of mobilising the large scale social and political power needed for this transformation is weak. While identifying the trends of falling inequality after the second world war and the rise again of inequality with the rise of neoliberalism, and the related defeat and demise of trade unions and social democratic political parties, there is little discussion of how democratic workers organisations can be rebuilt, how neoliberal capitalism can be overthrown, or even if any of that is necessary. As a result the book is weakest when addressing the economic and political obstacles to such progress and the type of political organisation necessary to carry it through. The book says: “Rather than a revolution, what is needed is a gradual and far-reaching transformation” but there is no real discussion of reform and revolution. When discussing solutions such as ‘employee ownership’ policies the authors acknowledge the likely resistance of shareholders and employers in general, such as in the introduction

of such a scheme in Sweden in the 1980s which was then defeated by employers when the political party supporting it lost power, but provide no idea of how this inevitable resistance can be combated politically.

Wilkinson and Pickett have been very upfront in their support of Jeremy Corbyn in the UK and just as this journal went to print John McDonnell, Labour's shadow chancellor (Minister for Finance) announced 'Employee Ownership Funds' as a key Labour policy initiative that would be implemented were they to win the next British general election. This book, like *The Spirit Level* before it, is indispensable in providing strong scientific evidence for the ill effects of inequality on our mental health and how possible it is to reverse these trends in theory. While there are still wide grounds for discussing and disputing the precise causal pathways and interactions of different social factors, the notion that inequality drives progress, that 'greed is good', is decisively debunked. This means the central economic tendency of the vast majority of western governments, especially our own, of promoting the accumulation of vast wealth by the richest 1%, in the pretended belief that benefits will 'trickle down' when the rich invest their wealth in the economy, is decisively proven to be in fact increasing rates of health problems two or three fold and some social problems as much as ten-fold with no real benefits to the economy. This trend is most obvious in housing and health in Ireland where privatisation and cost-cutting have increased anxiety and destroyed public services. Translating this evidence into permanent structural

social and political change requires a fundamental reorganisation of control of production and distribution that is unlikely to unfold piecemeal, is unlikely to be accepted by those in power and will require a mass movement of people power.

This book helps underpin the many reasonable demands for better health and happiness that must be made and fought over in the process of dismantling the current profit-based production system called capitalism, however quickly or slowly that may develop.

The pitfalls of identity politics

Asad Haider *Mistaken Identity: Race and Class in the Age of Trump* (Verso, London 2018)

Reviewed by Marnie Holborow

Identity Politics means different things to different people. Voiced by white, right-wing men like Donald Trump, it is a term of abuse for anyone who stands up against racism or sexism. In radical movements, it is often invoked as an instrument to criticize socialists who are supposedly too 'class reductionist'. Some mainstream liberals embrace identity politics as well. Hilary Clinton seemed to do so in her presidential campaign. Fellow Democrat, Jenifer Palmieri, said of the anti-Trump protests last year "Don't assume big demos against Trump are all about £15 an hour. It's not about moving to the left- it's all about identity now" Asad Haider's book delves into identity politics by looking at the historical moments in which it came

into use and what it has come to mean today.

Haider starts his analysis of identity politics by looking at its radical origins. When it first emerged, it was part of revolutionary socialist politics. In 1977, the black feminist group, the Combahee River Collective used the term identity politics in their founding statement, which Haider quotes, and in which they argue for a redistribution of wealth in a socialist revolution but with feminism and anti-racism at a key part. Barbara Smith, Demita Frazer and Beverly Smith, black feminists from the Collective, have clarified in later interviews that they specifically argued against reducing politics to the group identities of those engaged in struggles. Their identity politics prioritized coalitions with community activists, straight people, the labour movement in order to win their demands. Haider cites the fact that their feminist political practice involved walking picket lines in the building trades in the 1970's.

Haider explains that this socialist tradition has been completely forgotten in today's identity politics. What began as a commitment to put issues of gender and race at the heart of a revolutionary project, has ended up diametrically opposed to radical politics. Peggy MacIntosh's later 'knapsack' view of privilege, in which white people carry a set of advantages which set them ahead of everyone else, is often claimed to be the founding idea of identity politics. Haider shows that the metaphor of the knapsack collapses the social into the individual and assumes, wrongly, that individuals navigate an entirely open social field. Intended in the beginning as a means of encouraging more civilized behaviour amongst whites,



privilege theory, according to Haider, is based on white guilt. It tends to accept race not as something socially constructed, but as a natural fact. It repeats the capitalist understanding of race as separate groups of human beings which was invented to create division between people.

Haider explodes the concept of whiteness, challenging the idea that there is some fixed enduring idea of race. The clearest example is that of the white Irish whose racial oppression preceded that of Africans by several centuries. The racist oppression meted out to the Irish from the British was an ideology repeated, word for word, in justification of the genocide of native Americans and the enslavement of Africans. In Noel Ignatiev and Theodore Allen's pamphlet, *White Blindspot*, which Haider quotes, the imposition of white supremacy is a 'bourgeois poison' aimed at white workers as a means of class division and social control. They argue it played

a major part in holding back the whole of the American working class. They also point out that the 'psychological wage' of whiteness, led to Irish and Euro-American workers accepting higher levels of exploitation and degradation in their own conditions of existence. When the language of white privilege was taken up later, in the sixties and seventies, the focus completely changed. It was used to reject the working class as force for revolutionary change and claim, counter to Igantieff and Allen's argument, that white privilege was a fact, which led to people seeing white workers as 'part of the problem'. This is the emphasis in privilege theory today. Haider describes how contemporary white liberals use this position to attack socialists who happen to be white – like Bernie Saunders. Their caricature obscures the important point made by black revolutionaries throughout American history that the project of emancipation requires over-coming – not the

reinforcement - of the ideology of race.

Haider expands further on why identity politics is mistaken. What he calls the 'holy trinity' of race, gender and class, are in fact different social categories requiring analysis in their specific material and historical contexts. He argues that identity politics was an ideology that suited the interests of new middle black middle class which had made the journey from revolutionaries to 'race leaders'. If you are now a black mayor and slash public spending, which will impoverish black people more, then appealing to one black community can help cover that up. Haider's short book is wide-ranging and draws on different intellectual and political influences - Judith Butler, Wendy Brown, C.L.R. James to name but a few.

Asad Haider is on the editorial collective of *Viewpoint Magazine*, a US-based journal among a growing number with a radical Marxist outlook. Haider describes himself

in the classical Communist Party tradition. (At the launch of his book in Seattle, he actually described himself as a Communist of the Third Period tradition which carries pretty off-putting Stalinist and ultra-sectarian associations). But Haider identifies much more strongly with the US Communist Party in the 1920s and 30s which played a key role in organizing black workers – unlike the social democratic tradition which had a poor record on race. Haider is keen to revive this impressive CP tradition and he is right. When the Scottsboro case unfolded in the 1930s in Alabama it was the Communist Party that was associated with the defense of these young black men, imprisoned by southern racist injustice. Communists in the North had also earned the admiration of black workers by their organizing work against enormous obstacles. An organisation which brought black and white workers together is indeed a model that should be remembered today.

But it is worth pointing out that the Communist Party tradition has not always been so unflinchingly radical. Haider also speaks glowingly of the British Eurocommunist, the late Stuart Hall, for his prescient analysis of the rise of Thatcherism, the new political strategy for the ruling class, what we now know as neoliberalism. But Haider neglects to point out that Hall's tactical conclusion for the left in its approach to Thatcher was adaptation, not confrontation. Hall's arguments were used by those in the Labour Party to abandon all talk of socialism and support the crushing of the left – all in the name of offering a more credible alternative to 'the great moving right show'. Haider seems to believe that that the Communist

Party is necessarily more socialist than Social Democracy. However, the two traditions can sometimes be strikingly similar.

It would have been useful if some of this experience could have been brought to bear on the challenges confronting the US left today. Haider provides us with much well-placed criticism of the Democratic Party in its role as an agent for capital and how voting for the Democrats has never increased working class power. But there is little in the book about the political strategy needed to win those people genuinely concerned about racism, who may be in the orbit of the Democratic Party, to the socialist politics that Haider advocates.

However, what jumps out at you from this book is the Haider's fighting spirit and his optimism regarding the movements of today. He is irritated by endless academic discussions about language such as whether 'occupy' is too closely associated with colonial occupation which he rightly sees as rather missing the point! He is heartened by the rising movement against Trump and its ability to mobilise thousands and gives an enthusiastic description of the spontaneous mass protest Trump's Muslim ban at San Francisco International Airport which showed such an outpouring of anti-racist solidarity.

He also draws on his own experience as a Pakistani-American. He is amusing about people who believe in identity politics but seem to make an exception for people of colour with socialist politics. He tells us of one political meeting in which a man rambling on about how he didn't see any brown people in the room, at which Haider and another black comrade, sitting directly across from him, looked at

each other incredulously. Haider's book is a great read and provides useful insights into the debates within the rising wave of socialism in the US today.

John Charles McQuaid: Ruler of Catholic Ireland

John Cooney
The O'Brien Press
1999

Reviewed by Nicholas Coules

he recent joyously successful campaign for repeal of Article 8 of the constitution set me wondering about the man who spent his life welding Catholicism into the Irish state, Archbishop John Charles McQuaid. While the insertion of the Article in 1983 post dated his death, His Grace (he was fond of his titles) would have undoubtedly have approved of this additional buttress to the dyke he created. His biography by John Cooney makes for reading that is both interesting and appalling.

McQuaid was born in 1895 in Cootehill, Co. Cavan. His father was a doctor while his mother was the granddaughter of the local postmistress. As befitted such lineage his education was as a boarder, first locally, later at Blackrock and Clongowes Wood colleges. John Charles joined the Holy Ghost Fathers (they nowadays style themselves Spiritans), in time taking vows of poverty, chastity and obedience. He built his powerbase from Blackrock College where he was Dean of Studies from 1925 to 1940. There it was he met the movers and shakers of Saorstát Éireann. In time he built up a network of spies and informants



that would have done credit to the Stasi. Nothing happened at the centre of government that he did not know about. The same can be said regarding Dublin Corporation, the legal, medical and teaching professions. All of this stood him well when Rome made him Archbishop of Dublin and Primate of Ireland a position he held from 1940 until 1972. By that time the Papacy had, in the light of the Second Vatican Council, come to view him as an anachronism and forced his retirement. He died the following year.

It is often said of people that they are a mass of contradictions and McQuaid certainly had his. As a 15-year-old student at Blackrock he one day accidentally collided with a Brother Gaspard O'Reilly. Br. Gaspard, who was generally believed to be away with the fairies, said; "I have been anxious to meet you. God expects great things from you. Correspond with your present grace; that is all in your power – and be

devout to Our Lady." This made a powerful and lasting impression on the young McQuaid directing him to join the Holy Ghost order where he wanted to become a missionary in Africa. Our Lady was also a big hit with him. But in the real world he wasn't one to let mysticism stand in his way. In matters material he was a combination of hardnosed business man and adroit political schemer.

McQuaid as Archbishop was the other bookend to that period of papal authoritarianism, religious and civil, known as ultramontaniam, which was imposed by Cardinal Paul Cullen in the years following the Great Famine. This regime prized order above all else. Here, plainly, was religion as social control and its possibilities were immediately seen by the Irish bourgeoisie. Cumannán Gael, Fine Gael's forerunner, and later Fianna Fail happily gave carte blanche to the Catholic Church as they strangled the Irish revolution. John Charles can be accused of many things but never of idleness. He worked like a beaver. He took up his archbishopric after lengthy labours guiding De Valera's hand while he worked on the constitution. He wrote to The Chief as often as three times a day. It is hard to know which of them to feel sorry for. As he settled into his role his power and vanity grew apace. He enjoyed being chauffeured around Dublin in his Dodge limousine. Finding Drumcondra no longer to his liking he bought a property at Killiney. This mansion of 13 bedrooms standing in 12 acres of farm and woodland had a splendid view of the bay. Here he had a lift installed in the belfry the better to enjoy his interest in astronomy. The building of a shooting range allowed him to practice with his .22 rifle. How he squared all of this with his vow of

poverty we don't know. This much is certain many Dubliners would cheerfully have aspired to his level of penury.

The Lord Archbishop's power is well illustrated in the instance of Frank Aiken. Fianna Fail's Foreign Minister and former IRA chief of staff fearing for his immortal soul and/or his political skin thought it wise to write to His Grace seeking permission to attend a memorial service organised by the Swedish ambassador.

The service to be held at the Unitarian Church, St. Stephen's Green was to mark the recent death of the Swedish queen who was inconveniently Lutheran. The episcopal reply advised attendance without active participation as the get out strategy.

Before we conclude another incident is worth relating. Our Lady's Choral Society held a performance of Handel's Messiah in Dublin's enormous Theatre Royal. His Grace was a little late arriving. The house was in darkness. The choir was about to begin when a spotlight picked out His Lordship in opulent scarlet and black making his way to the distinguished visitors' box. The choir chanted -Ecce Home- behold the man. His Grace bowed slightly. My mother would have said, had he not been a catholic priest that is, that he was as proud as Lucifer. Catholicism of McQuaid's sort has become history as the separation of church and state becomes a possibility. It drowned in the icy waters of the capitalism that changed Ireland from rural backwardness to an industrialised urbanised land. The Catholic Church preached a peasant religion to a people who are no longer peasants and it now has no relevance for them. They unwittingly colluded in their own destruction. Oh, the piquancy of it!