

human rights for the people of Northern Ireland. Is this wrong? We do not think so. But the leadership of the St. Patrick's Day Parade thought so. They ordered the police to throw out the NAIF contingent, knocking the photos of the Derry Martyrs to the rain-soaked street, shoving and kicking participants.

The people who control the St. Patrick's Parade in New York City, men like Judge James Comerford, want to pretend that oppression and murder no longer occur in Ireland. They want St. Patrick's Day to be a day of shamrocks and green beer, majorettes and marching bands. NAIF is not opposed to fun and festivities, but NAIF believes that contingents should be permitted to express concern for the oppressed in Northern Ireland and support for their struggle for civil rights. Moreover, NAIF believes this to be part of the essential tradition of St. Patrick's Day. NAIF was attempting to bring to the American public the seriousness of the situation in Northern Ireland and for this was forcibly removed. Why were the Parade Officials so afraid of the pictures of 13 Irish people massacred in Derry? Could a partial explanation lay in Aer Lingus' (Irish Airlines) heavy financial influence within the Parade Committee and its desire to present Ireland as a peaceful, tranquil land undisturbed by murder?

Of course, the Parade Committee has its own version of events, for example:

A parade official, Mr. John O'Rourke, said the National Association for Irish Freedom had no permit and could not be allowed to continue marching. The organization however, was listed on the official programme. . . The parade chairman, Judge James H. Comerford, when asked to explain the decision, said the group had weapons, then denied the group had been removed at all, and finally threatened to have the questioning reporter removed.

Irish Times 3/19/73



The NAIF marched from 46th St.

NAIF did have a right to march in the Parade. It had sent representatives to all Parade Committee meetings; it had paid its fees; and it was listed on the official program. In fact, NAIF did march in the Parade on Fifth Avenue from West 40 Street up to East 63 Street. But Parade Officials interrupted the marchers at that point and, joined by the police, shoved NAIF out of the parade.

As a nonviolent organization, NAIF carried only banners and pictures. It did not carry arms as Judge Comerford charged. NAIF supports the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), a non-violent, non-sectarian organization leading the mass struggle for civil rights in Northern Ireland. NAIF does not support violence in Ireland or in New York City. It was the St. Patrick's Day Parade Committee, headed by Judge Comerford, that started violence on 63 Street when it unjustly ordered NAIF out of the parade. A woman carrying one of the photos was knocked to the ground and kicked. She had to be taken to the hospital.

The **New York Times**, in keeping with its tradition of biased reporting on Ireland and the Irish-American community, printed this distortion:

An attempt by a small group identified as members of the National Association for Irish Freedom tried to break into the march at 63 St. and Fifth Avenue.

New York Times 3/18/73

The **New York Daily News** carried a similarly inaccurate story. But, because of protest and because so many spectators had seen NAIF marching on Fifth Avenue, the **New York Times** was forced to correct some of its comments on the parade:

In an article on the St. Patrick's Day parade, The New York Times reported Sunday that the police removed a group of marchers from the National Association for Irish Freedom who tried to break into the march. The association was a scheduled participant, and parade officials had them removed partly because of objections to pictures they carried, showing some of the 13 victims of the 1972 killings at Londonderry, Northern Ireland.

New York Times 3/21/73

As the truth spread, even leaders of the Parade Committee were compelled to retreat:

Judge James Comerford, head of the parade committee, later said he didn't have the full facts about the incident, but he added that he was sorry it happend. He said the association members "were authorized to be in the parade." We have no conflict with the group. Naughton is a sincere and hard working guy. We'll be inquiring about it.

NY Daily News 3/25/73



At 63rd St. the police move in to stop NAIF.

NAIF is not opposed to shamrocks and green beer; but it believes there must also be an awareness of the events in Ireland. NAIF believes that the struggle for civil rights in Northern Ireland is a just struggle and deserves the support of everyone, especially Irish-Americans. NAIF believes this struggle must be supported on St. Patrick's Day and everyday throughout the year until full civil rights are achieved. NAIF, in carrying the baner of civil rights, is marching forward in the best traditions of the Irish people. Join us in our march.



**JOIN THE NAIF Send \$1 today to: National Association for Irish Freedom
799 Broadway, New York, N.Y. 10003
(212) 254-1757**

Dear Sir:

I have a sad commentary to make on the St. Patrick's Day parade. My three sons and I travelled 60 miles to march in the once-a-year parade, that parade which is supposed to renew our sense of Irish heritage. I decided I would show my concern and disgust with the ugly, murderous situation existing in Northern Ireland.

Contrary to newspaper and television reports, which said that the parade was broken into by the National Association for Irish Freedom, the NAIF met and lined up as assigned by the parade committee schedule, at 46th Street, between Fifth and Sixth, at 1 p.m. There are about 75 in our group. By 1.45 we were marching up Fifth Avenue. I felt a great pride in what we were doing - we are Irish, this has meaning. At last I'm doing something more significant than lending a sympathetic ear, or giving a dollar or two.

Some years ago while in high school I was forced to march in this same March 17 parade. One marched or one was punished (unless, of course, one had a damn good written excuse for not being present, in uniform, when the attendance was taken). I was there, rain or shine, no questions asked, freshman year, sophomore, junior, and senior.

This St. Patrick's Day parade was different. I marched because I wanted very much to have a small voice, among many small voices, hoping to create a non-violent roar of protest and concern. A small voice saying that the Irish-Americans can change, and are changing. We are being un-WASPEd. We do remember the stories told by our parents about the hardships our own grandparents and great-grandparents suffered under John Bull for too many years. Our children will not be raised to the strains of "When Irish Eyes are Smiling," and "Galway Bay." This is not what their heritage is about.

The NAIF marchers leading our group carried pictures of the 13 people

massacred in Derry on Bloody Sunday, 1972. The idea was to remind us of the organized, cold blooded, premeditated murders of unarmed human beings on that Sunday.

At 63rd Street, after marching 17 blocks, we were stopped by the police and ordered out of the line of march. The police were following orders given by some of our most respectable New York Irishmen, those steadfast pillars, those harp strummers, those greenflag waving men and women who make up the parade committee, and who also, I must add, assisted the police in our removal from the avenue. In other words, we were kicked out of the St. Patrick's Day parade.

While standing on the side street trying to hold back tears of anger, hurt, humiliation, and self pity, my sons looked up at me with frightened eyes, asking why, why, what did we do wrong?" The only explanation I could offer was that we carried 13 cheap blown-up pictures of dead Irishmen which the Irish, greenhorns and narrowbacks, did not want to see. Not on this great day for the Irish. They were not ready for the small voices of a housewife and her five, six, and eight year olds.

The irony of this story is simple. People in Ulster are killing each other, but we don't want to think about it. We, the Irish-Americans, my people, Kiss-me-I'm-Irish, let's hit another bar, dye their hair green, wear a green carnation, and a green tie, and a green sweater - we know what St. Patrick's Day is all about. All fun and games. But these are troubled times, and it is sad to realize that the organizers and spectators relate more to a brass band from Philadelphia than to the horror that exists in Ulster.

As Brendan Behan once said, "We all know St. Patrick banished the snakes from Ireland, and some of them came to New York and became judges." He forgot to add the St. Patrick's Day parade committeemen.

Patricia Smith
Washingtonville

It's A Gray Day For The Irish

This letter appeared in the Village Voice and The Irish People following St. Patrick's Day.