

Review of **Martin J McCleery**, *Operation Demetrius and its Aftermath: A new History of the use of internment without trial in Northern Ireland 1971-75*. Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2015. 202pp., £70 hard-cover. ISBN: 978-0-7190-9630-3.

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In August 1971 the UK government, following a request made from the devolved government of Northern Ireland, authorised the re-introduction of internment without trial for suspected members of Irish Republican paramilitary groups in Northern Ireland. This new work, based on the author's PhD thesis at Queen's University Belfast, studies in detail the planning, implementation and impact of this counter-terrorism policy over the four years in which it was in place and represents the first monograph-length academic study of this particular aspect of the early period of the Northern Ireland Troubles.

McCleery's historical account measures contemporary and more recent analyses, against both government and accepted nationalist myths and narratives by carefully gauging its arguments against the evidence in a revealing and skilful way. The work is strongest in its discussions of the debates surrounding the internment policy's introduction, the use of intelligence to identify suspects for the various lists that were developed and in the use of 'enhanced' interrogation techniques. McCleery's work is especially useful in demonstrating the limitations of received wisdom taken from the post-facto accounts given by both the internees and the *interners* clarifying that, for example, whilst internment was used almost entirely against Irish Republican organisations, its targeting of those organisations was ultimately fairly accurate.

This work follows a recent trend for studies in the Northern Ireland Troubles toward narrower, local, or issue-based accounts. One might look to an originating point in these kinds of studies to Niall Ó Dochartaigh's *From Civil Rights to Armalites* (1997) that focused on Derry (usefully extended through research by Warner and Prince in 2011) though of late Henry Patterson's work on the Irish border, *Ireland's Violent Frontier* (2013) and Hennessey's, *Hunger Strike* (2013), along with Tim Wilson's comparative work *Frontiers of Violence* (2010) have all served to overthrow mythologies and the many local amnesias associated with issues in Northern Ireland's troubled past. It is in this area that McCleery's work makes its strongest contributions. Accounts of the impact of internment traditionally demonstrate that the policy caused an initial spike in violence with a new, higher plateau established shortly thereafter. This book goes into far greater detail than before to explore *how* internment radicalised and encouraged existing republican paramilitaries; paramilitaries that had previously been reluctant to press home a dedicated

campaign of violence in their districts. Through the examples of increased violence caused by the radicalisation of actors as a result of the introduction of internment, McCleery demonstrates that it was in the provincial towns of Newry, Dungannon, Lurgan and Enniskillen where the escalation of violence occurred and where the wider guerrilla campaign of the later 1970s and 1980s emerged. This thesis, challenges other, more state-centric hypotheses that conclude that it was Operation Motorman (in August 1972) that forced the IRA into a conflict in the countryside and on the border (e.g. Smith and Neumann, 2005) and which ignore the propaganda effect a year earlier of using internment solely on the Catholic community. The radicalisation of rural Catholics in Northern Ireland did not lead to fully formed and competent IRA units appearing overnight (importantly McCleery accounts for the time lag) but there is no doubt from this research that the increasing efficacy of Republican attacks in these areas was not without want for trying between the summers of 1971 and 1972. Forensically examining relevant incidents in Chapter 5 McCleery concludes:

‘Just as the [earlier] Falls Road Curfew in Belfast and killings of Beattie and Cussack in Derry brought the conflict in those two cities onto a new plane, it was after the introduction of internment that similar levels of violence were to occur in the four provincial towns.’ (p.163)

Curiously McCleery's conclusions with regard to loyalists and internment are less well developed. He is correct to demonstrate that they were not considered a threat to the state, but this far from absolves the state from its responsibility to defend law and order and might have been critiqued further. Loyalists were, after all responsible for 588 deaths from 1971 to 1976 (Sutton, 2002) and, in the Ulster Workers Council Strike of May 1974 played a large part in bringing down the promising power sharing agreement between constitutional nationalists and unionists.

Another area of weakness in this work lies in the limitations of its research to printed and archival sources. Although four interviewees are listed in the bibliography, they contribute only a limited amount to the overall understanding and come only from the republican paramilitary side. The recent Boston College tapes scandal, followed now by the collapse of a large research project on Dissident Irish Republicans being conducted by the University of Liverpool has clearly limited the number of available and willing interviewees for projects such as this – particularly when it concludes that, by the policy's end, the vast majority of internees were far from innocent parties in the conflict. But this does less to explain the lack of interviews with retired officials, soldiers and police from whom a wealth of information particularly in relation to the localities McCleary is so interested in exploring and what might have been gleaned would have added significantly to the research already conducted.

This work's greatest contribution however lies in the way the evidence it provides substantiates the ideas that some liberal researchers of terrorism (and counter-terrorism) have put forward. In particular, this work supports a number of arguments in Richard English's *Terrorism: How to Respond (2009)* and in Louise Richardson, *What Terrorists Want: understanding the enemy, containing the threat (2007)*. This book charts the course and impact of a Counter Terrorism policy that in virtually every measurable respect failed, not because it had to, but because it was poorly timed, unevenly applied, led by weak intelligence, and undermined by a more convincing counter-narrative provided by opposition propagandists. As a result, this original work will be of interest to scholars and practitioners of Counter Insurgency and Counter Terrorism, along with those concerned with Irish history and debates surrounding the emergence of the Troubles in Northern Ireland.