

# **Explosion in Ulster**

## **Ulster: Religion and Class**

Peter Gibbon

## **PD Militants discuss Strategy**

Baxter/Devlin/Farrell/McCann/Toman

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British capitalism has long exported its violence to its imperial possessions: it does so in full measure to its nearest vassal territory—the police state which it maintains in Northern Ireland. Irish workers and peasants have, however, a revolutionary heritage, both of class struggle and of combat against British imperialism. This tradition has powered the civil rights association in the North, a movement whose radical component—People's Democracy—is attempting to transform a sectional fight for elementary civic rights on the part of the Catholic population into a class assault of both Protestant and Catholic workers, peasants and students against their exploiters. Such a development threatens not merely the maintenance in power of the Northern Irish client régime—it menaces the equally reactionary 'independent' régime in the South.

The struggle in Northern Ireland has attained a higher level than on the English mainland. The Left there has traditionally failed to win any important section of the working class to anti-imperialist positions, even where it is subjectively anti-capitalist. The situation in Northern Ireland highlights the urgency of doing so. If effective solidarity action is to be achieved, a considerable work of propaganda and demystification in Britain will be needed. This pamphlet consists of an article by Peter Gibbon which analyses the interplay of religion and class in Northern Ireland today, in the light of Irish history since colonization. This is followed by a discussion of tactics and strategy in Northern Ireland with leading comrades of the People's Democracy.

## The Dialectic of Religion and Class in Ulster

The six most north-easterly counties of the Irish mainland form a colony 16 miles from the coast of the Mother Country. A third of its population owe it neither historical, nor religious, nor political allegiance. The industry of these six counties has been in decline for over a decade. Its political universe has been subject to an ideological retardation dating back centuries. 'The truth about the Unionist state is that it is founded upon negations.'<sup>1</sup>

The recent General Election was called in a vain attempt to solve at the polls a series of problems which were in fact intractable within the existing constitutional framework. The results at the parliamentary level was predictably inconclusive; outside parliament it demonstrated the growing support on the one hand for extreme right-wing Protestantism, and on the other for the radical socialist wing of the Civil Rights movement.

### **Antecedents**

In the 16th century, communal land made up the greater proportion of the land in Ireland. For the next 100 years, Ireland suffered a continual pillage at the hands of the overlord power of England. Where resistance to colonial terrorism was

strongest, in the north-east, James I—in despair at the failure of the Irish Reformation—offered the province of Ulster to the English mercantile class on the condition that they established there a non-Catholic ‘plantation’ of yeoman farmers, townsmen, artisans and traders. The material they used was Scottish and Presbyterian.

The Southern provinces of Leinster, Munster and Connacht meanwhile remained ruthlessly exploited occupied territories. The stages of exploitation are numerous. The first wave of expropriations dates from Cromwell’s time; the second from the reign of William of Orange, when he defeated James II at the Battle of the Boyne; in gratitude William allocated vast estates to adventurers in his following, while safeguarding the Protestant landowning ascendancy in Ulster.

The Battle of the Boyne inflicted on the South a land system which prevented agricultural competition with both England and the North. Capital could be neither accumulated nor invested. No internal market was possible, and thus no middle class appeared. In Ulster it had been present since the plantations. Like its counterpart in England it was interested in a removal of economic restrictions and in gaining for its native industries a measure of protection. Throughout the remainder of Ireland power rested in the hands of a miniscule group of landowners, performing no economic functions and with no claim to the allegiance of the peasantry. It had to rely for its dominance on the support of an English army maintained through Dublin by a huge and corrupt bureaucracy. Even so, Irish agriculture potentially threatened England’s confinement of Ireland to a debtor role, with a heavy annual tax burden. The absurdity of this situation led the Ulster middle class to seek an alliance with the more progressive Anglo-Irish landlords; this produced the Irish Volunteers, who gained from England the concession of partial legislative autonomy in ‘Grattan’s Parliament’ of 1782. As leader of this parliament, Grattan claimed freedom for property-owners of all religions—‘The Irish protestant could never be free until the Irish catholic ceased to be a slave’—while simultaneously seeing that if this freedom was achieved the armed support needed to maintain the land system would disappear. The introduction of English industrial technology managed to obscure this contradiction for some 10 years. Eventually, however, it became increasingly obvious to the more radical members of the Ulster middle class that Grattan’s provisions were utterly inadequate.

The increasing parliamentary impotence of the professional strata of the middle class led to their recruitment, under Wolfe Tone, into a revolutionary secret society, the *United Irishmen*, probably the most progressive bourgeois force ever to exist on these islands. Tone conceived of himself and his movement as in essentially the same situation as the French revolutionaries of 1789.

Tone managed to achieve the support of elements of the Catholic peasant masses, especially in the North. In areas where sectarian conflict existed least he gained some success amongst the propertyless Pro-

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<sup>1</sup> *Ireland in the Age of Reform and Revolution*, Nicholas Mansergh, Allen and Unwin, 1940.

testants. But by 1798, as the movement got off the ground in the countryside, its leadership had already been decimated by internal betrayal and a loss of nerve. General Lake's reign of terror, in which the Orange Order was used directly by the State for the first time, eliminated it altogether. The movement's potentiality provided the political excuse for the Act of Union in 1801; in fact it was the landowner's refusal in the Irish puppet parliament to surrender every vestige of autonomy to England that precipitated this coup. Irish industry's inability to keep up with the more advanced innovations of the industrial revolution, which demanded abundant supplies of coal, had in any event weakened its capacity to resist English pressure. Only linen production in the north was no threat to England and survived, later providing a financial basis for industrial development in Belfast. The 19th century saw the South relegated to the status of a supply-area of cheap food and labour for Britain. Both Anglo-Irish landowners and the nascent urban middle class had been economically defeated.

After a temporary revival during the Napoleonic Wars, Southern Ireland underwent rapid social disintegration: the constant threat of a peasant revolution was averted only by skilful manoeuvring of the weak, Catholic, rural middle class. Where did this class come from? As the largest landowners increasingly became absentees, intensifying rack-rents, they created a class of Catholic middle-men and money-lenders (gombeens) who slowly accumulated enough wealth to become small landowners themselves. It was this group who under O'Connell sought integration with the Anglo-Irish colonial landowning class through religious emancipation. In the movement they created to this end they managed to harness the desperate Catholic peasantry, largely through the agency of the Church, promising them to ameliorate the land situation. However, 'amelioration' possessed two quite distinct meanings for the classes involved. For the middle class it meant a *rationalization* of the existing direction of events: an acceleration of the trend toward cattle-farming on exhausted land. For the peasants it meant a revolutionary redistribution of land as the only form of wealth. Even given the divergent directions of the movement, the acceptance by the middle class of the abandonment of tillage was a confession of weakness. Its most energetic members—professionals, merchants, and shopkeepers—disappeared with many of their clients, during and after the Famine. Henceforth most of the Catholic bourgeoisie gravitated—still unheard—to the Nationalist Party, while the peasantry provided the motor for the sporadic quasi-insurrectionary movements of Emmett, the Young Irelanders, the Fenians, the Irish Republican Brotherhood, and eventually the IRA.

### **Ulster and the Emergence of Home Rule**

Ulster was the only part of Ireland where an urban middle class experienced a 'natural' historical growth. It was allowed to industrialize unimpeded. Its ascendancy was based on the Penal Laws, which forbade Catholics to rival it economically. Thus, as Connolly pointed out, 'Already by the outbreak of the Williamite war in the generation succeeding Cromwell, the industries of the North of Ireland had so far developed that the "Prentice Boys" of Derry were the dominating



factor in determining the attitude of that city toward the contending English kings.<sup>2</sup>

Not all Ulster Protestants, of course, were bourgeois, or employed in industry. After the colony had been established, many impoverished Scottish crofters set out across the water in search of a better living. Amongst them there existed a traditionally strong piety—that of Knox, Calvin and Wesley. In the country areas they settled side by side with Catholics; they had been promised improved conditions and expected them yet they found the Catholic peasantry always willing to pay higher rents than them. For the Catholics, long conditioned by the land system, realized more readily that to possess land was the only way to survive. Protestant landlords often confirmed this by turning tenants of their own religion off land for which Catholics would pay more. The Scottish Ulsterman's reaction to this threat was what Strauss discreetly calls 'resolute intimidation'. Where Catholics attempted to establish cottage industries—after Grattan's parliament—they presented a double threat to the traditional basis of Protestant livelihood. The Protestants responded by creating secret societies, notably the Orange Order, whose first victims were the Armagh weavers—the Protestants' greatest competitors in the most competitive region in Ireland. The symbols the Order adopted—sashes, drums, pipes and King Billy banners—reflected their parochialism and sectarianism. When Dublin castle was unable to suppress Tone's project of giving the peasantry a radical political consciousness, the Orange Order was the only force able to keep the peasants divided. The great Northern landowners thus seized upon it as a providential gift, and the Ulster middle class followed its sectarian direction, turning from Tone's national ideal.

By 1829 and the crisis of Catholic Emancipation, Ulster linen was the only remaining protected industry in Ireland. The economic reason for this exemption was that it did not compete with any English trade. The political reason was that Ulster's superior status was thereby confirmed, and its bourgeoisie further divided from its peasantry by the enrichment of the former. Sufficient capital was accumulated for the development of new local industry—ship-building in Belfast and shirt manufacture in Derry. Ulster was thus able to avoid the swamping which hit the Irish Market. Customs barriers—a necessity for the survival of the South—had by the mid-19th century already become unacceptable to the Ulster bourgeoisie. Again, some years later, only Ulster was able to resist the introduction of wholesale ranching: for in this province grain, oats and flax could still be grown as cash crops. Ulster was thus the only province of Ireland able to resist the Famine, for in Ulster the land was not devoted to the potato. By the time of the great depression of the 1870's, Ulster's smallholders had become a buttress of secure conservatism. The Land Act of 1881, which barely affected conditions in the South, won them a reduction of rents which separated them com-

<sup>2</sup> *Labour in Irish History*, 1967 edition, p. 51. The Derry apprentices closed the gates of the city when they heard its mayor had surrendered the town to James II. Thus 'Derry's Walls' have acquired a religious significance for Ulster Protestants. Hence the depth of sectarian passions aroused by attempts of the Civil Rights Movement to hold meetings within them, and the opportunity for extreme Protestants to identify the less frantic Catholic-baiters in the Ulster ruling class with Mayor Lundy, the proto-typical traitor of 1690.

pletely from the insurrectionary Land League which was expanding at the time.

For the peasantry of Leinster, Munster and Connacht, the years 1875–1888 saw a final pauperization following in the wake of starvation, disease, depopulation and a routing from the land in the fashion of the North American Indians. The average age of the Southern population was now 55, and its chief source of income was remittances from overseas relatives; even its role as English ranch-hands had been undermined. The Catholic bourgeoisie was no longer in a position where the Union yielded even the smallest rewards for it. Throughout the 19th century its appeals to Westminster had fallen on deaf ears. Home Rule was now the most moderate demand the Southern bourgeoisie could make which would prevent the peasants from turning on it: Michael Davitt was threatening to mobilize the peasantry in support of nationalization of the land under a Republican government. Its own objective in demanding Home Rule was distinct: it was an attempt to re-establish industrial protection in the South. It was precisely such protection that capitalists in England—alarmed by the decline in their share of the world market, after French, German and American tariffs—were determined to refuse. Strauss comments accurately: ‘The determined opposition of the landowning aristocracy to Home Rule could be taken for granted, but the violent and even hysterical hostility of the British business class would be incomprehensible but for this idea’.<sup>3</sup> Parnell hoped to create a buffer Catholic urban middle class (through industrialization) which would block any drift towards social revolution in Ireland.

While the Protestant capitalists in the North might in theory have regarded this project with political sympathy, in practice they saw it as a calamitous economic threat to them. For first Parnell, and later Sinn Fein—who were to be the voice of precisely the emergent class which Parnell anticipated<sup>4</sup>—regarded industrial Ulster as the corner-stone of their dream of a Gaelic Manchester. Belfast and Derry had no internal Irish competition. They enjoyed an integral link with British industry and commerce. Their working class was in some respects closer to that of Clydeside than of Dublin. It formed part of the great industrial triangle of the valleys of the Mersey, the Clyde and the Lagan. Under Home Rule it would simply subsidize the South and act as a catchment area for its taxation. *Thus Ulster became opposed to any form of Home Rule, including partition—which would inevitably reduce its hinterland.*<sup>5</sup>

For most of the time the Belfast industrialists left the political leadership of the anti-Home Rule campaign in the hands of the Northern landowners and the British Conservative Party. It was these groups who

<sup>3</sup> *Irish Nationalism and British Democracy*, Methuen, 1951.

<sup>4</sup> The gradual relaxation of Britain’s ties with the South was concomitant with a minimal economic growth in certain service industries whose centres were displaced to the cities of Dublin and Cork. This allowed the growth of the class which was to become the new backbone of republicanism (and which also colluded in the defeat of the southern unskilled workers immediately prior to the First World War).

<sup>5</sup> This is the meaning of Mansergh’s quotation at the beginning of this article. The fact is that *nobody* in Ireland before or during the Home Rule crisis wanted partition. When it was eventually suggested as a compromise it was regarded as implausible



used Unionism as a stick with which to beat the British Liberals, whom they effectively fought to a halt before the First World War.

In 1918, Sinn Fein won an overwhelming electoral victory, and by 1920 a guerrilla war was in progress in the South. A settlement was now clearly imperative. A truce was arranged, and at the end of 1921 a treaty signed with provision for the establishment of an Irish Free State—to exclude most of Ulster. A commission was to determine just how much of Ulster could be retained without endangering Protestant hegemony within it. Attempts by sections of the national liberation movement to reject such a settlement were defeated by the big bourgeoisie of the south in the Civil War of 1922. By 1925 the Southern government was forced to sign an agreement which acknowledged the exclusion of the present six counties from the Irish Free State. For forty years, little changed in the Northern six counties 'loyal' to England: the pattern of class power survived wind and tide.

### The Unionist Bloc

In Ulster today, the Unionist and Nationalist Parties form two political blocs, cemented by religion, which collude with and complement each other, under Unionist dominance. The unity of each bloc is dependent on the existence of the other. An understanding of the internal structure of each is a precondition of any correct analysis of the present crisis in Ulster. For it will be seen that the natural lines of class struggle have been nearly erased by the traditional party system of the North, which represents a monstrous distortion of the true social structure to the benefit of the Orange ruling class.

The Unionist Party, which has controlled the Ulster state for 50 years, is a bloc which welds together sections of at least five distinct social classes: 1. the landowners; 2. the industrial bourgeoisie; 3. the urban petit-bourgeoisie; 4. the working class; 5. the peasantry. This bloc has historically been *led* by the landowning class. It has been *united* by the ideology of Protestantism. It has been *integrated* by the institutions of the Orange Order. An analysis of Unionism must consider each of these aspects of its structure.

The landowning clique, symbolized by successive Premiers at Stormont—Craigavon, Brookeborough, O'Neill—is a branch of the traditional English ruling class. Within the British Empire, it traditionally provided a high proportion of army officers and to this day remains heavily Sandhurst-trained. It is distinguishable by source of income, style of life, education, world-view and accent: the rulers of Ulster speak to their people with a perfect Oxbridge inflection. This group has powerful ramifications into industrial capital, but is not exclusively identified with it. Local business men—the Orange bourgeoisie proper—have

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even by the Unionists, who knew that Ulster (the eight-county province) would never return a majority of Unionists to a provincial parliament. Hence it was reduced to six counties—a totally artificial and arbitrary decision informed only by the desire to create permanent one-party rule.

historically played a subordinate part within the political elite of Unionism—although, it goes without saying, their economic interests have usually been rigorously safeguarded.<sup>6</sup> The professional and middle segments of this bourgeoisie have historically been marginal to Ulster politics, if not excluded altogether. They have had little contact with the oligarchy above and have tended to regard the Lodges below as primitive and backward. Ulster, it should be remembered, has never truly experienced a successful bourgeois revolution. The struggle against Home Rule, the only major political issue to have appeared between 1789 and 1968, was led by the landowners in alliance with the English Conservative Party. The hallmark of bourgeois ascendancy, the nation state, is defined by its absence.

The integration of the Protestant working class into this ultra-reactionary bloc is the specific miracle of Unionism. It has been achieved by means of a unique set of institutions, the Orange Lodges, whose role can only be explained by reference to the other two groups cemented into the Unionist bloc: the peasantry and the petit-bourgeoisie. It has been seen how the Orange Lodges arose in the countryside, as Protestant peasant organizations aimed against fellow Catholic peasants and agricultural workers. After the famine, the depopulation of the countryside in the South took the form of emigration abroad. The concomitant but far less marked drift from the land in the North was largely absorbed by the expansion of Belfast. In that city a working class emerged possessing much the same characteristics as those of Clydeside and Merseyside—apart from the intensity of its piety. For traditional values and identifications were imported into the towns through the establishment there of Orange Lodges. Whereas these had originally been geographically-based peasant organizations, they now became congregationally-based urban centres of political and cultural life. In England, the proclivity of the 'aristocracy of labour' and the petit-bourgeoisie for Working Mens Clubs and Friendly Societies reflected the relatively secondary penetration of religious differentiation within popular culture. In Ulster, the role that these institutions played was filled by Orange Lodges, unifying the leisure, political and religious activities of their members, in keeping with the precepts of the Presbyterian, Calvinist or Wesleyan faiths.

The structure of these institutions enabled them to be flagrantly manipulated. Because of their partly masonic character (a product of their originally defensive mode of organization) and their ideological fusion with church and chapel structure, their politics and values were in no sense open to democratic contestation. In the local Lodges, the petit-bourgeoisie (through acknowledged possession of superior social attributes and proficiencies) usually became dominant. It could do this

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<sup>6</sup> Sir Horace Plunkett, leading Unionist politician and publicist at the start of the century, lamented this fact at length in 1905: 'For the lack of wise guidance which our captains of industry should have provided, Irish Unionism has, by too close adherence to the traditions of the landlord section, been the creed of a social caste rather than a policy in Ireland. . . . There must be a combination of the best thought of the country aristocracy and that of the captains of industry. Then, and not till then, shall we Unionists as a party exercise a healthful and stimulating influence on the thought and action of the people'. *Ireland in the New Century*, pp. 67-68.

in mixed congregations by using status and prestige, or in purely working class congregations by its supply of ministers. This is not to say that globally it controlled the Orange Order. Because much Orange fervour was still firmly located amongst the Church of Ireland poor, the prominent and wealthy members of this relatively High Church managed to attain the same hegemony in the cities as they had traditionally possessed in the countryside. Lodges based on the Presbyterian Church (the church of the middle and upper working class) were usually controlled by the petit-bourgeoisie, while those of the Church of Ireland remained under the direct control of the Northern oligarchy.

The capture by the landed and business elite of two senior Orange institutions, the Apprentice Boys of Derry and the Royal Black Preceptory, and their conversion into high-powered political machines clinched and solidified this mis-shapen class bloc. Both eventually played much the same role in Ulster as the Broederbond in South Africa. For the local Lodges had previously maintained a cultural continuity for the Protestant urban poor without providing them with a direct political expression or link with the ruling groups. Through the intervention of the officers of the Apprentice boys and the Preceptory, Protestants could now find access to housing, employment and social promotion, and the historical separation of differentiated education and residence was confirmed. In return, all that was demanded of the poor was their political allegiance.

For the working class a further institution was created to this end—the Unionist Labour Association. These were precipitated by the rise of the new Trade Unionism. Industrial combination appeared the one front where ruling-class hegemony might be seriously challenged. The events of 1907–13 are crucial to an understanding of how the expression of the objective interests of the Protestant workers never rose above the level of economism, and how the Unionist bloc survived intact.

At the beginning of the century, Protestants' and Catholics' work was already differentiated by skill, pay and security. The Protestant workers, often engaged in craft industries, were largely affiliated to the amalgamated English unions. The unskilled Catholics were either completely unorganized, or members of the new mass unions whose organization, ideology and practice threatened the respectable strivings of craftsmen. Until 1913, these new unions, under Larkin and Connolly, attained a special efficacy, and even managed to begin to draw substantial sections of the lower-paid Protestant workers under their wing. One of the major weapons of their armoury was the sympathy strike, whose successful co-ordination demanded a powerful and autonomous *Irish* TUC. Such a development was opposed by the British unions, who were able to combat this encroachment upon their interests by cutting off financial support for independent Irish action. This traitorous policy meant the destruction of the possibility of a united labour movement—a threat which Unionist bosses, however, took seriously enough to create local branches of the Association' of 'loyal' Protestant workers. Connolly's later change of position on the national question and his move toward Republicanism meant that the imperialist fomentation of religious divisions amongst the workers could no longer be effect-

ively opposed. The blame for this historical disaster must be laid at the door of British trade unionism.

Today, the labour movement in the Six Counties has been further weakened by a series of structural hurdles and judicial penalties. Whatever managerial policy happens to be, where Catholics and Protestants are employed together they are divided vertically or horizontally. Catholics are hampered by educational disadvantages and almost invariably take the lowest-paid jobs. In many areas they do not work at all; instead their wives are employed as cheap labour and the men stay at home with the children. Although in Derry women have displayed a high level of political militancy, great difficulties remain in their economic organization. Foreign firms, who establish plants with government aid and then pull out when they have maximized profit for one or two years, create a sector of permanent semi-casual labour. Meanwhile, the high degree of unemployment in both North and South has facilitated the blacklisting of union militants, often forcing activists to leave Ireland altogether.

Needless to say, the Unionist state has always rejected the legalization of minimum trade union rights. For as on most issues the Unionist Party in this connection is well to the right of the British Conservative Party. Trade unions are regarded as essentially anti-Unionist for the simple reason that they contain Unionists, Nationalists, Republicans, Socialists and Communists. This means that they do not fit into the vertical divisions of Ulster life, and hence renders them dangerous. The result of all these multiple blockages of an economic, political and religious character has been the prevention hitherto of the emergence of a powerful labour movement in Ulster.

To sum up: Protestantism as such has always been the articulation of Unionism, whose grass roots strength has been the Orange Lodges, presided over by the Royal Black Preceptory and the Apprentice, Boys of Derry, organizations which contain every leading Unionist politician and most of Ulster's capitalists. The Protestant working class is provided with its major cultural and political institutions by the Lodges, and through them is linked directly with the ruling complex. Through this network Unionism has maintained blanket hegemony, demonstrated by the fact that at no election since the war have any more than 12 per cent of all Protestants ever voted Labour. (The diagrams on the following pages illustrate the complex interplay of religion and class in the politics of the Six Counties).

### **The Nationalist Bloc and the Catholic Opposition**

The miserable Catholic obverse of the Unionist Party—miniature and mirror of it—has been the Nationalist Party, which represents substantially the same Home Rule policy as did its predecessor 80 years before. Its politics are clerical conservatism, its social base the Catholic landowners, tenant farmers and sections of the agricultural proletariat.

Whereas Unionism has succeeded in maintaining the solidity of the Orange bloc from the period of Home Rule down to the last few

# The dialectic of Religion and class: the social basis of the present struggle.

**Diagram 1 Religion and voting behaviour 1965**

**Religion**

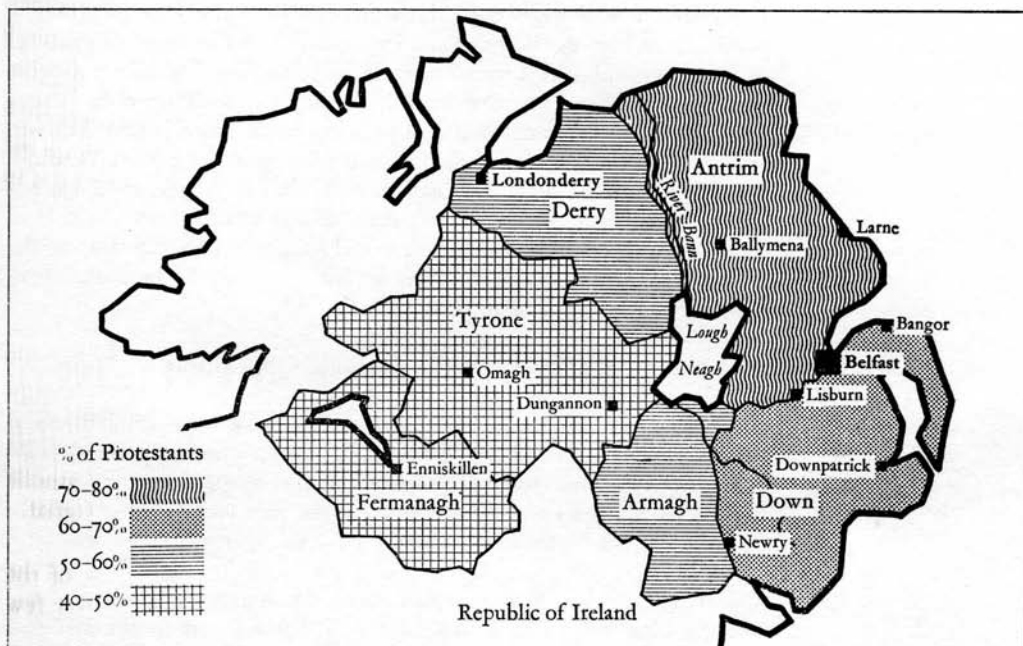
CATHOLICS	PROTESTANTS
	Presbyterian 45%
	Church of Ireland 37%
	Methodist 8%
	Others 10%

**Politics**

CATHOLICS	PROTESTANTS
Nationalist 58%	Unionist 86%
Northern Ireland Labour Party & Republican Labour Party 31%	Northern Ireland Labour Party 12%
Unionist 6%	Others 2%
Others 5%	

NB The number admitting no religious affiliation is almost negligible

**Diagram 2 Religion and geography**

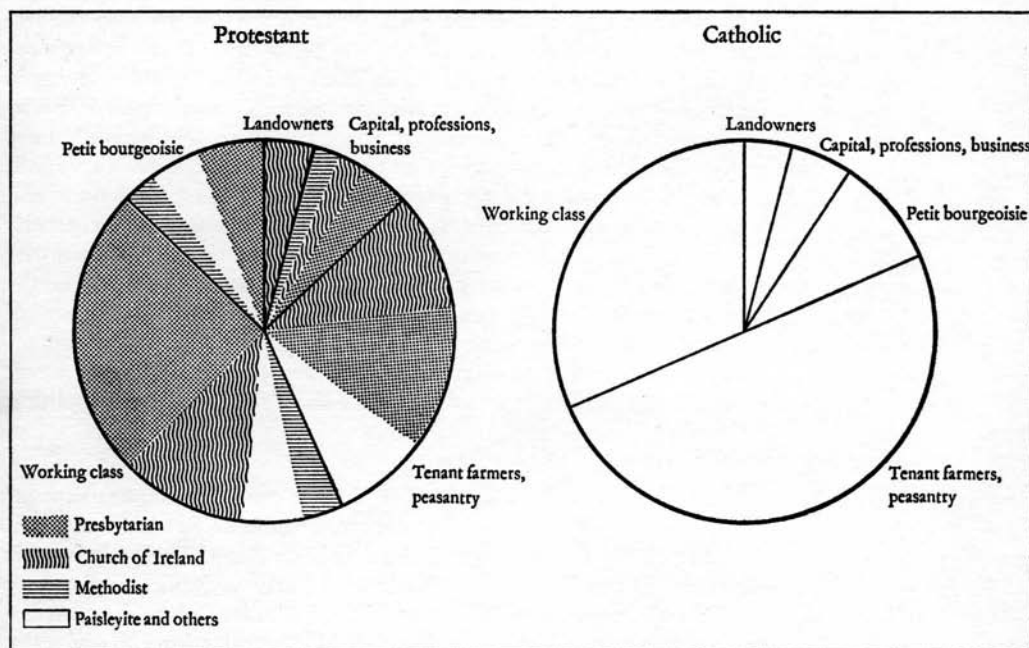




**Diagram 3 Geography, population, industry, income and employment**

COUNTY	ACREAGE (EXCLUDING LAKES ETC)	POPULATION	NO. OF EMPLOYED PERSONS (EXCLUDING SELF-EMPLOYED) PER LEADING INDUSTRIES	AVERAGE INCOME PER PERSON (TAXABLE) P.A.
Antrim (inc. Belfast)	718,881	689,761	Shipbuilding 18,580 Agriculture 13,332	£632
Armagh	312,727	117,594	Agriculture 8,723 Weaving 2,491	£524
Down	609,030	266,939	Agriculture 14,122 Medical Services 3,892	£557
Fermanagh	418,411	51,531	Agriculture 7,519	£512
Derry	514,713	165,298	Agriculture 10,007 Men's Clothes 6,409	£539
Tyrone	779,552	133,919	Agriculture 13,075 Weaving 1,576	£525

**Diagram 4 Religion and class**



months, the Nationalist Party has not had a comparable success in building a durable Green bloc. Before the independence struggle of 1916–21 had even taken place, it had lost the leadership of the national liberation struggle to bourgeois republicanism. It disappeared altogether in the South after the establishment of the Free State. Yet in the North, despite the inroads of Sinn Fein and the Labour movement, this anachronism retained its dominance. This paradox, of course, is a direct reflection of the ideological retardation of its Northern supporters. Indeed it is only through an understanding of the position of the Catholics in the North that we can see how an archaic relic like Irish Nationalism has survived at all. In their position as an oppressed group in Ulster, the Catholic peasantry were constantly driven to rely on the Church to express their demands, for the Church in Ulster came to play the role for them of the absent middle class. Contrary to popular Protestant opinion, the Catholic Church in Ireland has always played a very defensive and reactionary role in relation to mass movements, braking and limiting them wherever possible. Above all, it has tried to ensure that such movements never go beyond its control—that is, never become either interdenominational or revolutionary. In the South it was frequently forced to make concessions to mass movements because of the elemental energies that they released amongst the peasantry. In the North it faced no such problem. Just as the Protestants constructed an ideology of *embattlement* within Irish national territory, so the Catholics within Ulster territory precisely reproduced this outlook: a siege within a siege. Thus the traditional defensiveness of the Church was here *doubled* by the local defensiveness of its flock. The result was that the Catholic Church in the North could get away with building a political machine available only for specifically *Catholic* agitation. In the Home Rule period, the Northern Catholics had organized their own sectarian society—the Ancient Order of Hibernians—because of the attacks on them by the corresponding Orange groups. The Catholic Church thereafter manipulated the AOH to keep the less moderate and defensive elements of the Nationalist Party under close check. The decline of the Nationalist Party in Ireland as a whole was in fact partly due to the conservative influence exerted upon it by its sections in the North. It is not surprising, therefore, that it should have survived in Ulster alone, where its traditional rural constituency have, like their Protestant counterparts, thoroughly internalized their embattlement. It is in this context that we can understand the reciprocity of Unionism and Nationalism in Ulster, *both* the product of minority groups, and through this reciprocity their ultimate identity. Given the hopeless deadlock of the nexus they form together, the total absence of political debate in the six counties over the last 50 years is understandable. The longer Nationalism exercised a monopoly of Catholic political expression, the tighter was drawn the knot closing Ulster's political universe.

In fact, after the Second World War, fissures gradually began to appear in the Nationalist bloc. The first occurred in the Belfast industrial area with the rise of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. The basis for this fissure lay in the failure of the Nationalist Party to duplicate effectively the urban integrative mechanisms of the Unionist Party. The AOH became progressively less a working class Northern institution, and more

a middle class Southern one; indeed, it eventually became merely the institutional base of the Catholic Church in Fianna Fail, the ruling conservative party in the South ("Soldiers of Destiny"). Thus when Belfast Catholic workers gradually ceased to regard the Church as their primary cultural focus in the urban setting, they escaped from Nationalist control—a control which was in any case far less dynamic and more lethargic than its Unionist counterpart. The extent of this defection can be measured by the fact that the Nationalist Party has not contested any Belfast seat in local or national elections in the last decade.

In Belfast, the initiative was then captured from the Northern Ireland Labour Party by the Republican Labour Party, differentiated from the NILP by its opposition to partition, its greater degree of militancy, and its occasional appeal to catholic sectarianism. The strength of its base amongst the Belfast Catholic working class derives precisely from its combination of the two fissuring strains on traditional Nationalism with which we are concerned—labour politics and republicanism.

In most areas of Ireland, Nationalism was superseded by Republicanism long ago. In Ulster, however, Nationalism maintained its rural grip because of the relation of the Catholic minority to a significantly different political and institutional complex. However, large numbers of small farmers and small-town poor felt the same attraction toward Republicanism as their Southern compatriots. Republicanism thus succeeded in capturing the militant resentment of these impoverished groups, and identified the cause of their plight as imperialism with straightforward simplicity. But the abstractness of its ideology and its absence of any *analysis* of the imperialist enemy allowed contradictory political tendencies and economic interests to co-exist within it. Like the labour movement, it too represented an attempt to escape from the dialectic of minorities towards secular politics, but unlike the labour movement it only managed to *impose* a formal secularism from the outside on the traditional dialectic. The Labour movement on the other hand, as represented by the Trade Unions and the NILP, has had a *naturally* secular social basis but has never been able to move effectively into the political universe, and has systematically displayed a tendency to be squeezed from it when tension has been marked. Whereas the Labour movement has usually been able to retain an economist base in trade union struggle even in times of sectarian conflict, the Republican movement conversely managed to retain its organizational base in the rural areas even when it became quite clear that its insurrectionary tactics had failed, for despite the defeat of the IRA campaigns, its organization still exists in the countryside, and with it the latent militancy it embodies.

Thus, by the mid '60's Labour and Republican politics had detached segments of the Nationalist bloc in town and country, but had ceased to be active challenges to its central domination of the majority of the Catholic population. Both co-existed on its flanks, rather than challenging it frontally for the allegiance of its supporters. Reaction, Orange and Green, continued to hold Ulster imprisoned in the past.

### **The Crisis Erupts**

At the beginning of 1968, Ulster was deceptively quiet. It seemed as if

the petrified political system of Unionism had never been stronger. In fact, beneath the surface, the conditions for a major crisis had been accumulating, and were near to explosion.

The post-war boom had been particularly important in Northern Ireland. A stable unemployment rate of 10 per cent was more than halved as work in the engineering, shipbuilding and textile industries reached a peak. This more than compensated for a slight run-down in the aeronautics plants. By the mid '50's, when this boom was beginning to ease off, the Chandos Development Council was set up with the primary aim of encouraging new industrial construction, modernization and investment. Chandos claimed at its inception that 'The back of unemployment will be broken in nine months.' He could hardly have been more wrong. The increasing antiquation of Ulster's industry was not remedied, but soon intensified. For this was the year of the first major post-war credit-squeeze, which strangled the large outlays of public money in Ulster by depriving it of the complementary British and foreign capital it needed. Thus 'development' simply became subsidization, revealing the contradictions of imperial control. Within the last few years credit has been even more drastically reduced, and the unmodernized industries have become largely unmodernizable.

Areas of Ulster's industry are frequently held down to protect British business, but the remainder never receives sufficient support to counter this retardation. What capital is accumulated is rarely re-invested in Ulster: in 1962 it had £420,000,000 worth of capital invested beyond its borders, while simultaneously it was receiving an annual subsidy of £100,000,000. Where 'rationalization' has taken place, it has produced centralization (Belfastization) of industry so that it would be better placed for trade with Britain. This had led to a denudation of the areas west of the River Bann, with the highest density of Catholic population. The balance of payments has been periodically adjusted by cuts in purchasing power. The result has been chronic unemployment and the creation of a high emigration rate, both of which are felt particularly severely in the run-down Catholic western areas. In County Derry, the unemployment figure sometimes rises above 25 per cent. The Protestant working class too, it will be seen, has been affected by the faltering of Orange capitalism; but the impact has been considerably sharper on the Catholic proletariat. Thus in the last few years, the Catholic workers and peasants in Ulster have suffered a bitter relative deprivation within a declining economy.

At the same time, Catholic middle-class political and economic expectations have been systematically frustrated. There is no outlet of political expression for them, and no upward social mobility is available either. Rates of Catholic employment in local and central government, for example, are 12 per cent and 6 per cent respectively. Only 4 per cent of those who earn £2,000 a year are Catholics. The Catholic professional class almost entirely serves its own segregated community, and has very little contact with its Protestant counter-parts. Nationalism had proved wholly ineffective in advancing their interests. This group was becoming increasingly frustrated and determined to act on its own account.



Simultaneously, another social group became politically awakened, this time a newcomer to Ulster politics—the students. To understand the role of the students in Northern Ireland, it is important to emphasize that Queen's University, Belfast, is one of the very few unsegregated institutions in Ulster. This meant that it provided a natural base from which an attack on sectarianism could be launched. Moreover, Queen's University is decisively not a regulative institution of entry into the Ulster ruling class. The children of this group are sent to English schools and thence to Sandhurst, Oxbridge or Trinity College, Dublin. Queen's students, on the other hand, are overwhelmingly middle and petit-bourgeois, whose ties to the ruling bloc are consequently not organic. Accession to the university potentially separated them from their religious and cultural backgrounds, liberating them from the home and hence, quite frequently, from inherited piety and bigotry. The preconditions for political radicalism thus existed. Mobilized first against the considerable political repression within Queen's University, the tumultuous international events of 1968 provided both inspiration and example. The world-wide wave of student revolt could not but have a violent impact on the one student group in the British Isles daily confronted with the repressive paraphernalia of a police state.

The Civil Rights movement was thus born of a confluence of radicalized students, a discontented middle class and the sufferings of the poor, in both town and country. The elementary demand for One man—One vote threatens Unionism in all areas where Catholics have a majority; the spectre of retribution appears everywhere west of the Bann. The first Civil Rights march at Dungannon in August 1968 was promptly banned from the town centre, on the grounds that it was a 'loyalist' stronghold. In October a police riot followed a demonstration in Derry: squads of the Royal Ulster Constabulary rampaged through the catholic ghetto venting their hatred on both workers and their homes. In January a similar epilogue followed a seventy-two mile student march from Belfast: this time the people of the ghetto replied to the R.U.C. with barricades and petrol bombs. For a few days, Bogside in Derry became a liberated zone, off limits to the Unionist state: workers erected barricades, created their own militia, their own general assembly their own radio station, declared themselves a free city. Further militant demonstrations and occupations occurred in Newry, where the armoured transport of the police was captured and destroyed by local militants. Within three or four months, the Civil Rights movement had shattered the whole equilibrium of Ulster society and unleashed multiple contradictions within it. There has been a permanent political crisis ever since.

### **Impact on Unionism**

The immediate result of the Civil Rights movement was to dynamite the compact Unionist bloc which had dominated Ulster for 90 years. The contradictions within it now, at long last, began to explode. This became evident in the very first days of the crisis, when tension between Prime Minister O'Neill and Home Minister Craig built up. Simultaneously, the violent agitation of Paisley, a low-church Pro-



testant minister who had won some prominence previous to the Civil Rights movement, now became one of the central forces in Ulster politics. The bourgeois press in Britain has represented these contradictions within the Unionist bloc in the usual inane fashion as a conflict between 'moderation' (O'Neill) and 'extremism' (variously Paisley or Craig). These moralistic notions of bourgeois-democratic politics have no meaning in Ulster. They are empty categories, which must be replaced with a concrete analysis of the different social forces at work.

The Unionist Party has classically been led by landed capital. Terence O'Neill, scion of the oldest recorded family in the British Isles, symbolizes this tradition. Confronted with the threat of the Civil Rights movement, O'Neill reacted by a bid to confuse opposition with vague promises of gradual reform; he also warned of the danger of any UDI for Ulster's industry (to revive Home Rule fears). This gentlemanly scheme of stabilizing the status quo by 'modernizing' it with some formal concessions undoubtedly reflected what the landlord class took to be the correct consensual position within the Unionist Party. It suffered, however, a rude shock. Under the impact of the Civil Rights threat, the five-class bloc of Unionism was disintegrating. Two separate, but related revolts have occurred within it—best represented by the respective figures of Paisley and Faulkner. Since Paisley's rise to fame was the precondition of the separate defection of Faulkner and his associates, it is necessary to discuss Paisleyism first.

### **Paisleyism : The Petit-Bourgeoisie unleashed**

In a word, Paisleyism is the revolt of the Orange petit-bourgeoisie against the Unionist oligarchy. It is a revolt which has succeeded in mobilizing numbers of Protestant workers, peasants and unemployed. In its class character, it thus bears considerable resemblance to fascism. A comparison with fascism, indeed, may help to distinguish it as a phenomenon.

Fascism usually arises in a situation of economic dislocation and political crisis. This combination is typified by a threat from the Left (the presence of a mass revolutionary party) and a weakening of the bourgeois-democratic state. It is often concomitant with an attack by the ruling class. Fascism then unites big capital and an enraged petit-bourgeoisie, who provide its shock troops and mobilize lumpen elements behind them.

Ulster, it is true, is not in a condition of complete economic dislocation (through which the petit-bourgeoisie is threatened with extinction by inflation and big capital with international liquidation). Nevertheless, Ulster has now been in what would elsewhere be taken for a depression for some years, although because of its special position, depression has become stabilized into a kind of normalcy. Secondly, the rise of the Civil Rights movement is in Ulster something like an equivalent to the threat of a revolutionary labour movement elsewhere, and has provoked a political crisis in the Unionist state (which, of course, has never been a liberal-democratic one anyway). Thirdly, it is evident that Paisleyism recruits from those social groups which were the militants of the mass

fascist movements on the Continent: petit-bourgeois and *declassés*. In Ulster, declassed elements in the usual sense are very noticeable. Each year, 2,000 of them leave the countryside for the cities, and it is probable that a good proportion of the Protestants among them are won to Paisleyism. Lastly, however, and this is crucial, it cannot yet be said that this essentially petit-bourgeois movement has been adopted by big capital in Ulster—although, as will be seen, it has had an enormous effect on the politics of Orange businessmen.

Paisley's militants are largely recruited from urban youth. This group has been subjected to cultural isolation and impoverishment, as well as to segregation. The permanence of depression and unemployment has meant that youth has not—as in most of Western Europe and North America—emerged as a distinct consumer group. Both this poverty and the strength of sectarianism have meant that 'youth culture' has passed it by. Indeed, mass communications have largely passed it by too. The organization of both education and entertainment is on a religious basis. Group identifications fall back on local sectarian loyalties: 'We are told that the various juvenile gangs, such as the "Loney's" from Pound Loney, the "Marketers" and the "Ivy Boys" from the Lower Ravenhill area use a question about religion as a kind of password.'<sup>7</sup> At the same time, much of Paisley's support derives from the Protestant unemployed, whose opposition to Civil Rights has an apparent economic rationality for them, in so far as simple religious equality in the present economic situation might mean for them permanent exclusion from production. In the Western areas, Protestants frequently provide services in Catholic districts, and fear for their property if there is any encroachment by 'popery'. In the countryside Protestants have traditionally been granted preference in sale and lease of land, and in the market for agricultural labour. Both these traditionalist groups intensely resent any 'threat' to Protestant religious 'freedom': whatever the Civil Rights movement demand politically, these groups are liable to interpret it as Republicanism or, more probably, Fenianism. Thus Paisley's form of amalgam is naturally attractive.

Paisley's methods of organization have close affinities with fascism—with some differences. The counter-revolutionary violence (the 'nailey' club) and para-militarism are the same. Its symbolism, however, is more traditional. Both Italian and German fascism created a frighteningly new symbolism, which was derived from the archaic, but departed from it radically in the functional advance towards the future. Paisley's symbols are resolutely retrospective: Union Jack, Orange Sash and Lambeg drum. The ideology which accompanies this paraphernalia is equally archaic. It relies largely on the stereotypes bequeathed long ago by the anti Home Rule campaign. The Catholic is dark, short, lazy and dirty, living in subsidized housing and drinking away his relief money. He is in every respect the negation of the Orange values of decency (by which the housewife, on finishing her housework, may be heard to say 'that looks more Protestant now').

It is in this ideological context that Paisley acquires his magnetism as an

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<sup>7</sup> *The Northern Ireland Problem*, D. Barrett and C. Carter, O.U.P. 1962, p. 76.

angel of retribution. He represents not only the ideals of the past, but hopes for the future—not only driving the enemy from the streets and exposing the ‘betrayal’ of ascendancy, but a better world for the Protestant poor. The earthly chord of this millenarian psalm may be found in the evocation of ‘Civil Rights for Protestants’ in his programmes and manifestoes. Outside Ulster, Paisley appears a neanderthal in the age of pragmatism. But to his own people, in Belfast or Ballymena, he seems a giant beside the mediocre O’Neill. In Bannside, he emerged as a plebeian tribune in a constituency previously uncontested—hence ignored—for twenty years.

For this is the final dimension of Paisleyism: it has exploited the genuine social resentments of the petit-bourgeoisie and poor against the alien landed class which has dominated Unionism for so long. Its radical rightism, initially aimed only at the Catholic minority, has now taken the demagogic form of a small man’s revolt against the oligarchy. By splitting the petit-bourgeoisie and sections of the Protestant workers and peasants away from below, Paisleyism thereupon detonated a second split, in the Unionist bloc, from above.

### **From Craig to Faulkner: Business**

The polarization on the streets between the Civil Rights movement and Paisleyism swiftly produced a division within the Cabinet at Stormont. Craig, the Home Minister, immediately saw that a powerful backlash could be created to the Civil Rights movement, provided its demands were misrepresented correctly. He could use this as a lever against O’Neill, without appearing to be deviating one iota from traditional Unionism. He merely had to denounce the Civil Rights movement as a threat to the Orange state as such—the traditional tactic used to contain the labour movement. But in the tense political crisis of late 1968, the objective logic of this was a change of positions between the two ruling groups within the Unionist bloc, displacing landed capital downwards in the name of a Protestantism its ancestors had created. The bourgeoisie which, as has been seen, had never achieved political dominance of the Unionist Party, could now at last make a bid for outright leadership.

In fact, Craig himself was not an acceptable leader for the business class in any challenge to the landowners. In some ways his past was insufficiently distanced from the latter, and in others he had failed to represent the former consistently. He could too easily be represented merely as brutal and primitive. The retrospective meaning of his defiance of O’Neill emerged, however, with the resignation of Faulkner, the Minister of Commerce. Faulkner, a perfect representative of local medium capital, was the ideal champion of the business class. This group already had serious grievances against O’Neill’s economic mismanagement. In particular, expensive Stormont subsidies to attract investment to Ulster had been repeatedly spent by British firms in covering ground costs for a year or two, followed by a rapid exit with the capital accumulated meanwhile as clear profit. Added to this, of course, O’Neill’s ‘inability’ to deal with the political crisis was now receiving world coverage, and investment was consequently in danger

of drying up. O'Neill lacked energy and ability; he had become increasingly remote and ambiguous. The moment was ideal for a challenge to his leadership.

The form of Faulkner's resignation—explicitly making verbal concessions to the Left (One man—One vote), while implicitly appealing to the Right (oust O'Neill)—revealed the tactical opportunism of his class very well, its determination to seize the moment to strike *within* the Orange system. Thereafter, Faulkner and his associates increasingly relied on a tacit alliance with Paisleyism in the fight against their common enemy. During the elections, the social cleavages within the Unionist bloc—hidden so well only a few months earlier—emerged dramatically. O'Neill mobilized the utmost resources of the landowning class, including its absentee notables resident in England, above all the Duke of Westminster: 'The Duke's campaign is only one part of the massive pro-O'Neill operation being mounted rapidly now in Ulster. Money is clearly no object. Aristocratic names are being tossed around freely by the Unionists, including the Duke of Abercorn, the Earl of Erne, to say nothing of lesser peers.'<sup>8</sup> O'Neill was able to keep substantial support within the business community, which did not desert wholly to the Faulkner camp. Conversely, Faulkner and Craig were able to use a disgruntled clique within the landowning class (Brookeborough clan) against O'Neill. The fight became increasingly bitter, and it was eventually evident that O'Neill had succeeded in unnerving powerful sections of the business class with the vision of social disintegration that might follow his removal. Faulkner retaliated by whipping up pseudo-radical sentiment with social attacks on the oligarchy, similar in tone to those of Paisleyism: 'The great strength of the party is that in its local association the trade unionist counts for as much as the boss. Now we have landed gentry and big money imposing their candidates at will. It's totally undemocratic.' The results of the elections showed that O'Neill had lost massively in the power struggle within Unionism, but that neither of his antagonists had gained sufficiently to evict him immediately.

### The composition of the Civil Rights movement

It must now be asked: what is the exact character of the Civil Rights movement which has such a devastating effect on the Unionist Party? Within it, two broad tendencies are distinguishable: first the Catholic bourgeoisie, and second an amorphous group of republicans, rural workers, urban proletariat and students. So far, these groups have only been separated by the militancy with which each has been willing to pursue the Civil Rights campaign, and the restraint they are prepared to exercise when confronted with the provocations of the state apparatus and Paisleyism. 'Civil Rights' appears *prima facie* to be a bourgeois slogan, a demand of the upper echelons of a segregated minority community for integration into the established order. Yet the most O'Neill could offer Catholic middle-class leaders in his temporary pre-election bid for their support was the possibility of future membership of the

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<sup>8</sup> *Sunday Telegraph*, February 9th.



Unionist Party and nothing more. In these circumstances, the middle-class leaders of the Civil Rights movement have not yet become divorced from the rank-and-file, despite the fundamental differences of class interest between them. For the rank-and-file, One man-One vote has very limited significance in itself; its importance is its link with One man-One job and One family-One house. For One man-One vote raises the household issue, as it is a demand relating to municipal franchise. The fact that households can be refused the vote means that the franchise is based on a clear class differentiation, at a level which directly involves the issue of discriminatory employment and housing. It is significant that the Civil Rights movement should have its spiritual home in Derry, for not only is Derry the city where Orange gerrymandering is most blatant, but it is a city which has traditionally lacked a clear working-class movement of any kind. This has allowed the presentation of the Civil Rights issue as a *civic* one, which at the same time contains clear working-class demands. Hence the relatively non-antagonistic nature of the composition of the movement in that area. Without the mass base there, the middle-classes elements in the Civil Rights movement would objectively be helpless.

This situation obviously creates great possibilities for the Marxist elements in the Civil Rights movement, at present mostly students in People's Democracy. For the students the Civil Rights movement has provided a potentially revolutionary role *because of an integration with the proletariat which no other student movement in Britain has accomplished*. Pitched directly into a confrontation with the State after the banning of the Republican Club in 1967 and their march on City Hall after the first Derry demonstration in late 1968, they have been greatly helped by their obvious credentials as a bona fide non-sectarian group. Clearly, there is a danger in their situation as a strolling revolutionary delegation within the miniscule territory of the six counties. This, however, has to some extent been offset by the existence of local organizational machinery made available to them by the Republicans, which has meant that they have not had to undertake most of the lengthy and painstaking preparatory work normally needed for students to create alliances with working people.

### **Ulster's Political Future**

The future will above all depend on whether the business class, which is today the crucial group in the Unionist political constellation, will decide to use the petit-bourgeois movement of Paisleyism to install a régime of violent repression: in which case, the classical combination that produced fascism in Europe would be formed. At all events, Paisleyism, which was formerly dependent for its respectability on the toleration granted it by the government, has now developed autonomously to a point where its strength demands toleration by Unionism. An alliance with Paisleyism might enable the Orange businessmen to by-pass O'Neill and landed capital altogether. Having used the Civil Rights crisis against the oligarchy, the business class could then contain the Civil Rights movement or drive it back along the old sectarian lines of Nationalism. The safest way of doing this would be to detach the



Catholic middle class and other reformist elements in the Civil Rights campaign with partial concessions, and then try to isolate the radical currents within the movement. Such an operation would mean an abandonment of Paisleyism, of course. But this might be a price worth paying, if it would 'normalize' the situation.

The goal of the Marxist Left within the Civil Rights movement, for its part, is clearly to win the Protestant working class away from the Unionist bloc and the Catholic working class in Belfast away from the ineffectual reformism of the labour movement there. Only when this is done will a unified socialist opposition emerge in Ulster, basing its unity on the *anti-capitalist* demands of One man—One job and One Family—One house. These provide the core of the programme necessary to fight the Civil Rights campaign through to its revolutionary logic and prevent it being blocked mid-way by bourgeois vacillations and defections. In the decrepit context of Orange capitalism, these demands have an explosively socialist meaning.

It will be noticed that the national question is missing from this programme. This is so for a very concrete reason. Although it cannot as such be neglected, any attempt to introduce it *in the old form* of pro or anti Partition would at present be disastrous to the project of creating a united working-class movement. In Ulster, a re-introduction of the partition issue into the forefront of politics would hold within it the danger of religious re-identification for Catholic participants, and regression for both Catholic and Protestant workers to the fixated impasse of the past. The Civil Rights movement now possesses a rural base in the western counties and an urban base in Derry; but it has made little or no inroads into Belfast, the industrial centre of the Ulster state and the key to future developments. Its main task is now to implant itself where the great bulk of the Northern proletariat is concentrated.

The best condition for the inevitable and necessary re-activation of the national question would be the eventual creation of a qualitatively different Republicanism south of the Border. These are some signs of this emerging with the leftward shift of Sinn Fein: Sinn Fein's position is now that the real Irish border divides the underdeveloped west from the industrialized east, not Green from Orange capitalism. If in the South a working class and small farmer's offensive was successfully launched, then the probability of the struggle in the North escaping the old definitions and identifications would be significantly increased. Meanwhile, the drive towards national self-determination should take the form of *concrete construction* of militant anti-capitalist movements North and South, rather than abstract elaboration in the programmes of the northern movement. The national question in Ireland has been so completely mystified and confused by religion that it cannot now be solved as a 'separate' issue, but only by class struggle to the finish in the north and south. There is no 'national bourgeoisie' in any part of Ireland today, ready to fight English imperialism and its economic grip on the whole island seriously. Ireland's inalienable right to self-

determination can and will only be exercised by its working class and peasantry. Proletarian power is the precondition of national independence.

*April 7 1966*

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P.S. The replacement of O'Neill by Chichester-Clark, which occurred after the completion of this article, only confirms the main lines of its analysis. The extremely narrow vote by which Clark defeated Faulkner for the succession within the Unionist Party demonstrated increased strength for the business interests which Faulkner represents, but no change in the continuing hegemony of the traditional landowning elite.

## *People's Democracy: a Discussion on Strategy*

*This interview with leading members of People's Democracy took place in Derry on the evening of April 20 1969, as the crisis which was finally to unseat O'Neill opened. Three days previously, Bernadette Devlin had been elected in Mid-Ulster. On the previous evening, a march through Burntollet had been banned, and a protest in Derry had exploded into a full-scale confrontation between the police and the Catholic working class. The participants in this interview are:- Liam Baxter, 23, student and member of Queen's University RSSF; Bernadette Devlin, 22, student at Queen's and now an M.P.; Mike Farrell, 25, technical college lecturer and member of the executive of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association; Eamonn McCann, 26, unemployed and member of the Derry Young Socialists; Cyril Toman, 26, technical college lecturer. Apart from Liam Baxter, all the participants stood for PD in the Stormont elections.*

## People's Democracy: a Discussion on Strategy

*How did the Civil Rights movement and People's Democracy start and what is their relationship to each other?*

*Farrell.* Formally the Civil Rights Association has been going for about two years and was conceived by its founders as an all-party organization similar to the National Council for Civil Liberties in England. It went out of its way, for example, to ensure that there was a pet Unionist on its executive. The tendency which wants to keep the CRA as a broad class-collaborating organization still remains within it.

*McCann.* The CRA behaved in the manner of all such organizations: it did nothing except issue press statements calling on the Unionist Government to be a bit more liberal. Then in August 1968 a number of people in Dungannon decided to have a Civil Rights march to protest over the allocation of housing in that area.

They invited the CRA, as the relevant organization, to lead the march, which it did. The march was stopped by Craig and the Paisleyites. After Dungannon some of us decided to have a Civil Rights march in Derry on October 5th. That march met with the most appalling and partisan brutality on the part of the police. The Civil Rights *movement* began then, and the CRA has been swamped in the movement.

People's Democracy began as a result of the police behaviour in Derry on October 5th. A number of Queens University students who were among the Civil Rights marchers went back to Belfast and organized a march there in protest against the police brutality. That march was also stopped and the students returned to the University somewhat demoralized and very confused. They began talking about what they should do and PD emerged from that discussion.

*Farrell.* But PD is not just part of the Civil Rights movement, it is a revolutionary association. Its formation was considerably influenced by the Sorbonne Assembly and by concepts of libertarianism as well as socialism. It has adopted a very democratic type of structure; there is no formal membership and all meetings are open. At the moment this structure is not working very satisfactorily, and I think it will be necessary, within the overall framework, to find a way of introducing a little more co-ordination. I had hoped that the PD would realise the necessity of taking a stand on class issues, and would therefore transform itself into a broadly socialist body, though a non-sectarian one in which socialists of several different tendencies could co-operate. I no longer think this will happen of its own accord. There have recently been some sharp disagreements within PD and differences have arisen between socialists and an alliance of anarchists and right wingers.

*Had the militants in PD worked together before it was formed?*

*Farrell.* The people who were batoned in Derry on October 5th and who were involved in the subsequent formation of PD were mainly members of the Young Socialist Alliance. They travelled to Derry together as the Young Socialist Alliance, which at that time was about 30 or 40 strong and consisted of students and recent graduates of Queens, and they were responsible for the subsequent protest in Belfast. So right from the start the Young Socialist Alliance was the core of Peoples' Democracy. It involved three of the people who are here now.

*Your central demands appear at first sight to be reformist—one man, one job and one family, one house. Why have you focussed on these specific issues?*

*McCann.* Because the transformation of Irish society necessary to implement these reforms is a revolution. We are definitely in a pre-revolutionary situation in the north. The Unionist Party must give something to the pope-heads of Derry to get them off the streets, but if they give them anything the Unionist party will break up. So by supporting these demands in a militant manner, we are supporting class demands and we are striking hard against the ruling political party.

*Farrell.* Our general strategy in the past was that we should enter into



the Civil Rights movement in order to participate in the mobilization and radicalization of the Catholic working class, and to radicalize the civil rights demands themselves. We should now move forward in two ways. 1. We should complete the ideological development of the Catholic working class 2. We should develop concrete agitational work over housing and jobs to show the class interests of both Catholics and Protestants. We have delayed far too long trying to develop the ideology of the Catholic working class and agitating on specific class issues. It is certainly now time that People's Democracy became an organization capable of carrying out this agitational work, for example, producing leaflets and—more important—a paper which carries analyses of that situation. If PD can't do this then it is time for the socialists in the PD and in the Civil Rights movement to form a direct socialist organization.

*McCann.* In fact we have failed to get our position across. We keep saying parrot-like that we are fighting on working-class issues for working-class unity, that our objective is a workers' and farmers' socialist republic. But when you say to the people in the Bogside area in Derry that they are being exploited because they are workers not because they are Catholics, they are not very inclined to believe you. All their lives they have been told by the Unionist Party that this is a Protestant state for Protestant people, and that pope-heads will be beaten into the ground if they dare to open their mouths. Moreover a number of jumped up opportunist nationalist politicians who have been the only means of expression of Catholic discontent, have accepted the Unionist perspective, and have deepened the religious divide. The consciousness of the people is still most definitely sectarian. The reason that we have failed to get our position across is that we have failed to fight any sort of political struggle *within* the Civil Rights movement, and the reason for that is that as revolutionary socialists we have been used, through the years, like revolutionary socialists in England, to talking to tens of people. Now suddenly, since October the 5th, we have found that we have an audience listening to us and applauding us, of tens of thousands of people. We got carried away by this, and submerging the Young Socialist Alliance in the PD; we submerged our politics into the Civil Rights movement. All that we managed to get across was that we were more extreme than the Civil Rights people. We have never made it clear that this difference in militancy stemmed from a political difference, we never made it clear why we were more militant; and the reason for that, I believe, is that we have been frightened of scaring off our mass audience. We thought that we had to keep these people, bring them along, educate and radicalize them. It was a lot of pompous nonsense and we failed absolutely to change the consciousness of the people. The consciousness of the people who are fighting in the streets at the moment is sectarian and bigoted.

*Yet you have taken a principled position on the religious issue and have won a considerable following. Do you think you have failed to break the grip of sectarianism even over the Catholics who support you?*

*Farrell.* We have radicalized the Catholic working class to quite a considerable extent, and in some degree got across to them the necessity of

non-sectarianism and even the fact that their Protestant fellow worker is almost as much exploited as they are. But we have failed to get across at all to the *Protestant* working class. So there is now a more radicalized Catholic working class, whilst the Protestant proletariat is still as remote and inert as ever.

*McCann.* I think this assessment is very wrong. Yesterday in Derry, after Catholic workers became enraged by the Paisleyites waving the Union Jack at them, they made for what we call the Fountain area, which is a Protestant working-class ghetto. As a group of Catholic workers, they instinctively made for a Protestant working class area once their emotions had been aroused, and they left no doubt in anyone's mind that when they got there they intended to beat the daylights out of any Protestants they found. I believe that we have failed to get our position across in the last six months. It is perfectly obvious that people do still see themselves as Catholics and Protestants, and the cry 'get the Protestants' is still very much on the lips of the Catholic working class. Everyone applauds loudly when one says in a speech that we are not sectarian, we are fighting for the rights of all Irish workers, but really that's because they see this as the new way of getting at the Protestants.

*Toman.* That is only partly true. We have not as yet worked very hard at getting the support of the Protestant workers, but we have radicalized the Catholic working class and to a certain extent separated them from the Catholic middle class. In future we must use the enthusiasm of the Catholic workers to get across to the Protestant working class as well. For example in Armagh a member of the PD who is also a republican managed to get the local people to form a united tenants' action committee which does have some Protestant working-class support.

*Farrell.* Yes, I think that Eamonn's view is very much conditioned by Derry. It has certainly been my experience in other areas, particularly Bannside, where we fought the election and set up civil rights committees and in Mid-Ulster generally, that there is not this hostility towards Protestants. For example at an election meeting at Moneymore the other night we were stoned and beaten by extremist Protestants, but the people supporting us were not provoked and did not attempt to retaliate. I have repeatedly found—though this may be non-sectarianism in theory rather than practice—that if you urge Catholics to accept Protestants as their brothers, this is always welcomed with a cheer and a clap. They are very devoted to the idea of not being sectarian even when in practice they may not have much opportunity to do this.

*Devlin.* I found myself that I did get through to Protestants while fighting this election. I had letters of support from Protestants, who still had the mentality of apologising for the fact, starting off 'I am a Protestant but as a socialist I agree with everything you say.' Our real difficulty is the support we get from people who are opposed to the Unionist party, not because it is capitalist, but because they associate it with having oppressed them because they are Catholics. Despite the fact that we are socialist we still get a lot of support from Catholic

capitalists and bigots. I think that the Protestants may be the best of our supporters because they are the more radical people, and that their socialism is more radical as they have worked out their positions. The basis on which we can communicate with the Protestants is by being honestly socialist.

People outside Northern Ireland fail to appreciate the confusion that exists here; nobody knows what they want or how to achieve it, and the sectarian division prevents some people from even discussing these problems. There are those who say that you must not mention words like 'Republic', because it raises the fear of a united Ireland in the minds of the Protestant working class. Others say 'Go out and say you are a socialist.' Others say that everyone knows you are a socialist but that one must not say so because that will offend people who think that socialism is communism and is anti-christianity. Finally although I personally believe there is very little christianity in this country, there is a lot of religion, and the one way you would unite Protestants and Catholics is by trying to get rid of both churches at once.

*You have referred to the original march through Burntollet, and yesterday's struggle started from a protest over the banning of a second march there. To what extent have you leafleted the Protestant areas you will be actually marching through, explaining to them that that the march is not meant as an aggression against them?*

*McCann.* Absolutely none. Only occasional, half-hearted efforts have ever been made at doing this. We have never had a perspective here.

*But you've been trying to march through these areas since January.*

*McCann.* All we have done is issue little press statements and ranted and raved at public meetings. There has been no concrete work done because there is no organization which has been able to sit down and say this is our perspective, this is our reason for being in the Civil Rights movement, and what we want out of the Civil Rights movement is A and B and C and here is how we go and get it. All our failures spring from the lack of anything even resembling a revolutionary party. You see, who would issue such a leaflet? Certainly not the Civil Rights movement who would never allow us to produce a leaflet explaining to the Protestant working class our reasons for marching through Burntollet. The CRA would split immediately because we have unbridgable differences with the so called moderates within the Civil Rights movement. There is nothing which exists that could issue such a leaflet.

*Farrell.* People's Democracy could issue such a leaflet.

*McCann.* It doesn't exist here.

*Farrell.* People's Democracy could do it in Belfast and it could do it in Derry too, because the People's Democracy *idea* exists in Derry and that would give it enough following to allow you to issue such a leaflet.

*If you accept Eamonn's account of Derry, what is the situation in Belfast? Your position there seems very weak by comparison.*

*Baxter.* The situation in Belfast has not been developed and there have been no big meetings or marches there, but I think that you would get massive support if you tried to hold them there.

*Farrell.* PD was initially an almost wholly student organization and was reluctant to go on marches in Belfast at times when ordinary workers could take part, largely because they were afraid that they would be sectarian. PD has now broken down that barrier and there is a projected march for Belfast in the near future. There is every reason to believe that we shall have a large turn-out, not because of the strength of the PD but because of the Republicans who do have a considerable following in Belfast behind their theoretically non-sectarian programme.

*Is that the Republicans or the Republican Labour Party?*

*Toman.* The Republican *movement*, not the Republican Labour Party, which has practically no membership and no following except for that of Gerry Fitt. Fitt is a popular Westminster MP because he does good social work on a non-sectarian basis, and gets houses for Protestants as well as Catholics, but he has no coherent political position.

*This raises the question of your own organization. What is the state of it?*

*Devlin.* We are totally unorganized and totally without any form of discipline within ourselves. I'd say that there are hardly two of us who really agree, and it will take a lot of discussion to get ourselves organized. The fact of the matter is that everybody knows where they don't want us to go, but nobody really knows what they do want and nobody is prepared to organize: we are all madly tearing off—nowhere.

*Toman.* A few people did come together before the Westminster election.

*Devlin.* Yes, about ten or fifteen in a population of more than a million.

*Toman.* Also, we did attempt to set up a group before the Stormont elections in January, but that too fell into abeyance. The Stormont Election completely dispersed us. Which may prove to have been beneficial, in that it forced us to break clear of our student base whilst at the same time we established ourselves as a national force. But it did mean that we lost the physical proximity necessary to strengthen ourselves politically and organizationally. Now in fact we face the problem of organizing PD from scratch.

*McCann.* As I've already said, the reason we have no organization is that we effectively dissolved ourselves politically into the Civil Rights movement: so effectively, in fact, that we have nothing to recruit people into once they have been radicalized by that movement. It has been a crucial error and a grievous one.



*The local Civil Rights associations in the different towns seem to have been substitutes for your own organization. Have they merely compounded your problems?*

*Farrell.* The Republicans have also been of very great organizational assistance, both to PD marches, such as the Long march in January, and to the Civil Rights and PD meetings in towns, where they have often provided the stewards and so on. As far as the local Civil Rights associations are concerned, they have brought us right up against the Catholic bourgeoisie. Initially, when the CR committees were formed they tended to be committees of the local bourgeoisie of each area, sometimes with a token gesture in the direction of workers. Only in Derry, where it sprang directly from the events of October 5th, was a Citizens' Action Committee elected by a public meeting. Other local committees were called for by the national CRA out of the context of a local struggle. All of them have emphasized the ending of the religious discrimination that has a painful effect on the prospects of the Catholic middle class, and an end to the Special Powers Act, which is aimed almost exclusively at Catholics. We have tried to swing the emphasis onto more general social and economic demands. For example, rather than demanding less discrimination in the allocation of housing we have demanded more houses, and we have had a certain amount of success. There has been a definite shift away from the green Tories and nationalists who originally dominated the committees.

*McCann.* There is a mis-statement of fact in what Mike says, which is important because of its reverberations. The Derry citizens' action committee was not elected by a mass meeting of any sort. It was elected by a meeting of about one hundred of the Catholic middle class of Derry on October 9th, specifically to steer the movement away from dangerous territory. There is a millionaire among its four leading members but not a single working man, and even though they have failed so far to channel the thing in a safe direction they will always try to stop short of a fundamental confrontation.

*Toman.* There is a new problem. So far we have spent much more of our time getting people to act and to react to situations, than we have in working out how in the long run action will really assist them. Coming together for this interview is probably the first time the people here have discussed problems in any depth for a couple of months. Now originally the difference between us and the bourgeois Civil Rights leaders was that we advocated action and they didn't, and our strength in the movement grew because of that. The Catholic middle class have now cottoned-on to this and have in many areas begun to advocate action themselves, usually action which is meaningless from anybody's point of view, which they can't control and whose consequences they do not perceive. Yesterday's proposed march through Burntollet is an example. It was called by the local Civil Rights association without any national consultation, either with the CR executive or with us. They were unable to react to the completely predictable threat that the Orangemen would oppose them with force, and when the march was banned all they could do was simply call everything off. Our danger is that the Catholic middle class will propose a whole series of mindlessly



militant actions across the province, and that instead of forming any socialist party will have to chase all over the place trying to scrape up some meaningful debris from these actions. Indeed this process seems to have already started.

*The implication is that you are shoring up the Civil Rights movement, firstly by posing militant demands which mobilize the Catholic workers and small farmers, giving the movement its numbers, and secondly by keeping this militancy within the arc of the Civil Rights movement. At the same time, it appears that you have been unable to transform it. So although at first sight you give it direction and punch, it seems that you are in fact performing a servicing function for the CRM rather than vice versa?*

*Toman.* Yes, this is broadly true. There have been some attempts to change it though. For example, in Armagh Civil Rights have called for a march some time in May and the PD group which has formed there even discussed not supporting such a march which, like the previous one in the town, is only likely to lead to a sectarian balls-up. But instead we decided to have a week of actions prior to the march, picketing, demonstrating over the housing problem there, occupying the labour exchange and issuing leaflets; in other words making our socialist position clear, and then participating in the Civil Rights march on those terms. Either they will have to reject us or we will transform the Civil Rights issue into one based on socialist demands.

*In striking contrast to England there is a living revolutionary tradition in Ireland. What forms does it take and how does it assist you?*

*McCann.* It's Republicanism, and the idea of the revolution is implanted in the minds of the Irish people surrounded by the glory of 1916 and its revolutionary martyrs. The idea of revolution is not at all alien to the Irish working class, as it is to the English, and when one calls for revolution, no matter what one actually demands there is always a link to Connolly and to 1916 and the armed uprising. What we have to do is to complete the national revolution by making the theoretical and practical link between what we are doing now, and what was fought for in 1916.

*Farrell.* Bourgeois democracy and the national state are recent developments in Ireland and their traditions do not run deep, in contrast to the tradition of armed insurrection, of revolution as a means. Republicanism, which is a radical movement based mainly on small peasant farmers, is the culmination of a long popular tradition of agitation for some sort of co-operatively organized farming society. This is something which more orthodox forms of metropolitan socialism must come to terms with, in a rural society like Ireland, and what we are trying to do is to link this very powerful tradition to the concept of international proletarian revolution.

*How do you see the present political situation developing?*

*Farrell.* My own views on this are rather tentative at the moment. In the past we tended to see O'Neill as representing modern liberalizing

capitalism, and in particular the interests of English, American and West German big capital as against the older native capitalism. O'Neill wanted to modernize things to bring them more or less into line with the rest of Western society. Further we thought that this sort of development was almost inevitable, with perhaps a Paisleyite backlash against it. Now it seems clear that although O'Neill represents these things, Northern Ireland cannot see the triumph of modernizing capitalism. The Paisleyite backlash of Protestant workers and farmers is so powerful it looks as though the reformers cannot win without destroying the Unionist Party, and if they destroy the Unionist Party they cannot win at all. Unless, perhaps, they could form a link with the bourgeois section of the Civil Rights movement, but it seems that the Civil Right movement has gone too far for that now.

*What are your strategic conceptions? How are you going to develop into a force for revolution?*

*Farrell.* The question of a revolutionary programme is a very complex one here in Northern Ireland. We cannot call for all power to the Soviets because our present basis is not the working class as a whole, or the working class and small farmers as a whole, it is only one section of the working class. This leaves us with the question of whether we concentrate initially on putting forward the largely reformist demands which could unite Catholics and Protestant working class, or whether we concentrate on posing the question of dual power in areas where the Catholic population is concentrated and militant—by getting the local Catholic population to take over and run its own affairs, a sort of 'Catholic power'. This would be a very serious decision, but it is just possible that it might be necessary for us to establish such dual power: on the one hand Catholic-based power, of a socialist form, and on the other, Unionist state power. This would demand a socialist movement among the Catholics to create socialist councils such that Protestant workers can see that they fulfil class demands rather than creed demands, and want to create councils for themselves or merge with the Catholics in them.

*Would this raise the question of secession?*

*Farrell.* Well, there's no question whatsoever of that, because the areas where the Catholic section of the population is militant are not the two areas which are supposed to have Catholic majorities—Tyrone and Fermanagh. The most militant area is Derry, after that perhaps Newry which is in South Armagh, after that perhaps a *part* of county Tyrone. Anyway you couldn't take out whole areas like Fermanagh and Tyrone because they contain vast tracts of country which are inhabited by people of very extreme Protestant views. Secession is as out of the question as is assistance from the 26 counties, where the bourgeois government, far from assisting any working-class movement (as I'm afraid some people in the Bogside imagine) will immediately fall with the six-country bourgeois government. The problem as I see it is that if you went ahead and tried to establish dual power in Catholic sectors you would have to do this in a number of clearly delineated and separate areas—Derry, Newry, Cole Island and Dungannon, perhaps. The other

way of dealing with the sectarian divide is to shift the whole emphasis of the CR movement away from symbolic activities such as marches to smaller agitational groups working on housing, farming and employment, and try and involve Protestants in these.

*McCann.* There is a terrible confusion in what has just been said over the business of Catholic areas electing local committees. We must always remember that there are already Catholic areas with 'Catholic power'. Newry has an overwhelmingly Catholic majority, too great to be gerrymandered. It *has* Catholic power. Further, there is nothing more calculated to prove to the Protestant working class that the Civil Rights people all wear papal flags under their jerseys, than the establishment of unofficial pope-head councils in areas like Derry and Dungannon. It would remove the possibility of winning any Protestants over to our cause and therefore nothing could put the establishment of *socialist* power further into the distance.

*Farrell.* Eamonn is wrong about Newry. In Newry you have an urban council elected under a restricted ratepayer's franchise; a bourgeois electoral framework which in the past has enabled an alliance of the Unionist Party and Green Tories to control the council against a weak and watery Irish Labour Party. What I suggested as a possibility was something quite different, the election of *popular* councils based on universal franchise defying the bourgeois state and not recognizing Stormont, which of course Newry Urban council does. This would be something totally anti-bourgeois. I'm not saying that this is the answer, I'm saying that we have to think about this as a possible answer.

*McCann.* Let me explain. You cannot have a Catholic popular council elected and then reveal the socialist nature of it. If you want to elect a socialist council you must campaign on radical socialist issues. It is impossible, for example, to elect a 'Catholic power' body which can do anything about housing. One of the reasons *why* there are not enough houses in Northern Ireland is that the central house-building agency, the Northern Ireland Housing Trust, owes £73,000,000 to the Central Bank and paid £3,500,000 alone in interest last year. This sort of thing has to be brought into the open, by campaigning on demands for the nationalization of the housing societies and the cancellation of the housing trust debt. O'Neill represents an adaption to the changing needs of imperialism in Northern Ireland, an attempt to escape from the old sectarian slogans which have ceased to be an adequate political arsenal for the modern bourgeois leader. He is going to fail because the North is tied, just as the South is in different ways, to Britain, and therefore to the failure of the Wilson government to solve the crisis of capitalism in Britain. O'Neill knows, and the whole Unionist Party knows, that they cannot deliver any better economic deal for the people of Northern Ireland in the immediate future. Unless we understand this and start to link it up to the cuts in the social services, the laws against the Trade Unions and so on, we are never going to be able to build any organization capable of overthrowing Toryism in this country. If we talk about local issues like Catholic councils without campaigning on the broad issues, we will never get anywhere.

*Farrell.* This is a misinterpretation of what I am saying. I used the words 'Catholic power' humorously. What I in fact meant was that in areas of heightened struggle such as Derry, or areas of Derry, it would be possible to elect a popular council. Now a popular council would, in the nature of things in Northern Ireland, be a Catholic council in that it would be mainly elected by Catholic workers. But it would not be elected *as* a Catholic council, and the purpose of electing it would not be to remedy the lack of representation of Catholics. It would be elected as a people's council in an area where people are singularly militant. It would be elected to remedy popular demands and therefore it would come up against all the general issues, such as interest rates for loans on housing, and it would have to campaign against them.

*McCann.* Dual power in this situation can only be Catholic power versus what Mike calls Unionist state power, which would in effect be Protestant power. You would not carry the Catholic middle class with you on such a programme, so it would be Catholic workers more or less versus the rest. Given the consciousness of the people at the moment, to which we have contributed, it could not be done. What we have got to do now is to realize what a mess we have made of the whole thing over the past few months. To give you an example of how big a mess we have made of it, we have been chanting 'One man-One job' for months, especially in Derry where we have the most militant and largest Civil Rights movement in the country. A few months ago half the work force of a factory in Derry was laid off, Catholics and Protestants alike. No one thought about organizing a march, of making our demands specific and concrete. We didn't raise the demand of 'No redundancies, work sharing on full pay'. We were so busy shouting 'One man-One job' and in keeping our mass audience, that when a real concrete material issue came up on which it might have been possible to prove to Protestant workers that what we are demanding is in their material interests, we were running around the streets in the Civil Rights movement. We have failed to give a socialist perspective because we have failed to create any socialist organization. What we must do now, even in the volatile state of politics we are in tonight in Northern Ireland, is to set up with the greatest urgency a serious organization. Even if it is only something into which we can recruit people to form lines of communication. We cannot form a Bolshevik party overnight. Rather than set up councils, we must try to set up some sort of radical socialist front between republicans and ourselves.

*Farrell.* The two are not necessarily contradictory. When the Bolsheviks campaigned for all power to the Soviets, the Soviets and the Bolshevik Party were not the same thing. The Bolshevik party existed as a party making demands and making an analysis. The Soviets were radical assemblies of workers. It would be possible to have a revolutionary socialist party, as well as to establish people's councils and fight for a majority on those councils. I do not want to be represented as an advocate of 'Catholic Power', but I do insist that we have to explore the radical possibilities of the base that we do have, at this moment, among the working class, and that base is the Catholic section of the working class.



*Whatever the differences between you on the immediate potential of the Catholic working class, you all seem to agree that the road to socialism in Ireland must pass via the Protestant working class. Is that so?*

*Toman.* I would answer that by saying bluntly, yes. It may seem rather unfortunate if one puts it like that, but if we are going to have a socialist workers' republic then we have got to have Protestants in it. They are the section of the people who support us least, but they are a decisive part of the urban proletariat. Therefore everything depends on winning them over.

*Baxter.* It's not even a question of their being in the majority in Ulster. You can't have a revolution in Ulster alone, and our aim must be to create a socialist republic, something on the lines of Cuba, without waiting for a British workers' republic—or we might have to wait a very long time. But even in Ireland as a whole, let alone Ulster, you cannot move in a socialist direction unless you have the support of some sections of the Protestant working class. Otherwise they will start a sectarian struggle and all the forces of Catholic reaction will swamp us.

*Farrell.* Could I say something about the question of the border here? The border must go, but it must go in the direction of a socialist republic and not just into a republic which might at some future date become socialist. Firstly the border must go because it is a relic of imperialism, and in order to root out imperialism we have to root out the neo-imperialist set-up in the South and the neo-colonial one in the North. Secondly, Northern Ireland is completely unviable economically and only exists as a capitalist entity at the moment because of massive subventions from Britain. Similarly the South on its own is an area of small farms with very little industry. It too is completely unviable on its own and as a result is also dependent on Britain. The unification of Ireland into a socialist republic is not only necessary for the creation of a viable economy, it must also be an immediate demand, because only the concept of a socialist republic can ever reconcile Protestant workers, who rightly have a very deep-seated fear of a Roman Catholic republic, to the ending of the border.

*Who are your allies south of the Border?*

*Farrell.* Our allies in the South are socialists, trade unionists and radical Republicans. The problem that we have in the South and which we met on our Easter march from Belfast to Dublin, is that there is more sympathy with our approach among the older people, the radical section of Sinn Fein and Trade Union militants, than there is among students—which is paradoxical given the student composition of PD. Our differences with the Dublin students are partly caused by misinformation, partly to our inadequate analysis of the situation in the South and partly because in the North we have much more contact with the working class than student bodies in the South which are purely university based.

*McCann.* The real reason why we are having trouble with our comrades in the South, comes back once again to the fact that there is no one



single organization to which they and we belong. Our only means of contact with the South is telephone calls to people we happen to know personally, so of course there is confusion about what we and they are doing.

*Toman.* There is a very promising Civil Rights movement in the West of Ireland, in Galway, which is an acutely depressed area, as well as some action in the East—especially a militant housing action committee in Dublin. But I am inclined to think that Civil Rights is only a label in the East of the 26 counties, and that the traditional forms of agitation are the way to get things going there.

*What was your calculation when you participated in the Stormont elections?*

*Farrell.* The decision to participate in the Stormont elections was very simple, and didn't involve us in any great problems. The election represented a Gaullist-type strategy on the part of O'Neill. He staged a election to frighten the bourgeoisie and the farmers in an attempt to produce a consensus which would bring the Catholic and Protestant middle classes behind him in a policy of reforming capitalism—thus completely isolating the Catholic working class, who were just beginning to stir. We participated in the election to smash this consensus, and in order to destroy (particularly among the Catholics who were very vulnerable to this) the notion that O'Neill's reforms would meet our demands. Our participation in the election was very successful from that point of view.

We stood on a radical civil rights platform, which was a socialist platform, which included the demand for workers' control, and it involved us very little in the way of electoral compromise. Further we chose seats which we were most unlikely to win, as we had no desire or intention of winning any seats, and we would have been gravely embarrassed if we had won any.

*Are you embarrassed by Bernadette's victory now?*

*Toman.* It's difficult to answer that with Bernadette here.

*Devlin.* I think you should answer it.

*Toman.* We hoped Bernadette would win, we expected her to win and we encouraged her, very much against her own will, to stand. First because it is important to show people that they have, to use their own words, 'got up off their knees'. Secondly, because it is an excellent means of gaining publicity for the situation over here. Thirdly, because there was a terrible fear that if Bernadette didn't stand somebody much worse would (*laughter*). If I could explain that. Austin Currey, who is at present a Nationalist MP at Stormont was a strong runner for the seat and would not have campaigned on an anti-sectarian platform. Fourthly, Bernadette brought to a lot of people for the first time the idea of a socialist republic.

Unfortunately part of the strategy may not have worked as Austin

Currey may be the new MP for Fermanagh and South Tyrone.

*Devlin.* That is not true, people were making it clear that they didn't want Austin Currey for Fermanagh and South Tyrone. They were aware of the fact that one of the reasons why he was willing to give up Mid-Ulster was that it might strengthen his chances there. The peasants of Mid-Ulster may not be particularly bright in the eyes of the *New Left Review*, but they know a political opportunist when they see one, and Austin Currey has a big X after his name.

*Farrell.* I am worried about two aspects of the electoral campaign in Mid-Ulster. The first is that Nationalist MP's did speak on Bernadette's election platform, which clearly was a grave embarrassment. These people are Green Tories, they are Capitalists and they are Catholic Sectarians and even their so-called left wingers are as much our enemy as the Unionist Party. It was very dangerous to allow them to speak, it could have totally distorted the candidature in the minds of the Protestants as one which represented Catholics alone—an attempt, in other words, to bring Catholics to power over the heads of Protestants. These people participated more or less on Bernadette's terms, which improves things slightly, but it would have been much better if they had not been there at all.

Secondly, the platform should have been a clearly socialist one and not one which emphasized *unity* in terms which could only mean unity of all classes within one creed rather than the unity of one class regardless of creed.

*Devlin.* It did not work out that way in the end. Brookeborough, the grand old Protestant himself, said that we had gained quite a lot, in his opinion far too many, Protestant votes. I was not worried about the recognizable Nationalists; by having them on the platform we effectively destroyed both Tommy Gormley and Buddy O'Connor, the Nationalist MP's for Mid and West Tyrone. Currey, it is true, was more difficult to deal with. Further the Protestants who voted for me could only have done so on a socialist basis; the platform was therefore socialist.

The reasons that Catholics who are not Socialists voted for me is that they did not want the Unionists to win. I agree that this is unfortunate, but I have no doubt that within a year these people will do their best to destroy me, and possibly may succeed. Within a year we will have sorted out the Catholics who voted for us on a purely Catholic basis and we will still have the support of the Protestants who supported us on a socialist basis, therefore we will have established the normal situation of the socialists supporting us and the non-socialists pulling out. As they are already.

*Farrell.* I'm worried about two points. During the election Currey's speeches emphasized sectarian rather than class issues, and since the election he has been emphasizing the unity of all anti-Unionist parties, which in practice means unity of all Catholics against Protestants. So this election may have aided the idea of Pan-Catholic unity, which is a

concept we must destroy. Secondly, by putting up and supporting Bernadette we may have given credence to bourgeois parliamentary politics and given people false hopes, while at the same time Bernadette is swallowed up in Parliamentary procedures, which would demoralize and reduce support for the non-sectarian part of the platform which was put forward.

*Devlin.* This is quite unfair to my victory rally speech. Despite the fact that all of you supported me in getting into the bourgeois Parliament, very few of you remained for the final scene of my crucifixion. When all the Pan-Catholics turned up to celebrate, it was really too much for the good socialists. In my speech after I was elected, I made it quite clear that if people thought that by sending me to Westminster, I or anyone else was capable of doing anything for them there they were quite mistaken. I said that all I could do was prove, by trying, that nothing could be done in such a parliament and that in a very short space of time I would be back to call them out of the factories, and if they were not at that stage prepared to come then they should leave my victory rally and trot off to join all the people who thought they could do something by parliamentary methods. But most of them were so glad they just swallowed it all anyway.

*Farrell.* The points that I am trying to make cannot be covered by a speech. The danger of being swallowed by parliamentarism requires constant vigilance and a clearly worked out socialist strategy towards a bourgeois parliament, using parliament as a sounding box and as only one section of an activity which is mainly extra-parliamentary. This is a matter which must be decided on as a matter of great priority.

*Do you have any initial plans as to how you are going to use Parliament as a sounding-box?*

*Devlin.* I have less faith in the whole thing than anybody who put me into the job in the first place. I will undoubtedly be treated with courtesy, I will be allowed, as a good little baby of Parliament, to make my maiden speech undisturbed, and then I will be told to behave like a good child and say nothing more. I won't accept this and I will probably spend most of my time working among the people of Mid-Ulster and working in the streets of London where I feel much more at home.

*Farrell.* The question of how one treats Westminster raises the much more serious theoretical issue of what demands we make of Westminster and of Britain as Irish Socialists working for a Socialist Republic.

*McCann.* By the way are we all aware that British troops were called in about an hour ago to guard key installations here?

*Farrell.* Well, that merely underscores the imperialist situation of Northern Ireland. The point I was making was that we must reject the idea of Westminster intervening to secure reform in Northern Ireland. We do not want reform of Northern Ireland, we want a revolution in Ireland and we will not get that by any Westminster intervention. The

role of an MP at Westminster should be to mobilize Irish immigrants in England, and to campaign against both Irish bourgeois States, exposing emigration from Ireland as one of their most serious contradictions, and emphasizing the right of the Irish to have a job and a home in Ireland itself.

*Devlin.* That is what I have been advocating. Much to the horror of everybody on the press, I made a simple statement that when the Westminster Parliament refuses to listen and act, I will go to the people who have been forced out of Ireland and work among them.

*McCann.* Obviously, no one here imagines that our problems could be solved by intervention from Westminster. But an awful lot of our supporters do see such intervention as a means of solving the problems over which we have been agitating. It is necessary to go to Westminster to demand the solution to these problems to show that Westminster is a farce, and that we will have to do it ourselves.

*Farrell.* There is one positive aspect to the chaotic nature of the whole scene here, that it has brought a lot of people into action who would not have been won to socialism by any programme. This very discussion has illustrated the need too for a radical socialist Party, but equally it has shown that we cannot form any high level organization, as we do not yet have the theoretical basis for any clearly determined policies, in fact we have not even discussed some elementary problems. What we need to form at the moment is some sort of alliance to develop a theoretical analysis of our struggle in the North, as well as to carry out systematic agitational work.

*What sort of international solidarity action is of greatest assistance to you, in particular from comrades in England, Scotland and Wales?*

*Devlin.* At the risk of offending our comrades in the rest of the United Kingdom I think that there is very little that they can do at this stage because they simply do not understand the mentality or the basic personality of the Irish people. In particular, the small farmers have a radical tradition, as Mike was just saying, but they do not like you using doctrinaire terms, and the workers will spell out workers' control for you, but they don't like you trying to do it for them.

*Toman.* Break up Ulster weeks, launch an attack on O'Neill and 'liberal Unionism', help organize the Paddies, the Irish immigrants, and raise money for PD.

*Baxter.* There was only one time historically that English workers could really have helped and that was the general strike of 1913. Then they failed to show solidarity in blacking cargoes from Ireland. If there were any comparable industrial action today, we would need help from across the water.

*What is your attitude to the demands that some English comrades have put forward for an end to British Aid to Ulster?*

*McCann.* They are very bad. They imply that the Protestants are white sahibs and that this is a colonial state. Ulster is *not* just a colonial state; it is in many respects, though not in all respects, an ordinary bourgeois state. The subsidies do not support a privileged layer of the population. The Catholic working class have a lot of children and receive a lot of state benefits. These sorts of demands may appear to be formally justified. But at ground level they are not effective. You can't demand them in Britain and not demand them here, and if you go to the most militant section of the working class and demand that family allowances be stopped you are not going to get very far. The whole national question comes in here but the simple fact of it is that you can't go down to Bogside and advocate that British subsidies are withdrawn.

*Farrell.* The Irish Socialist Republic cannot be built in isolation. The old rule is true; the best way English comrades can help the Irish revolution is by making the English revolution. And the second best way they can do this is by not misunderstanding the Irish revolution as a simple national struggle against colonialism or a simple struggle of the Catholic peasants against the Protestant landlords. Because it is much more complex than that, and they should get the complexity of the situation here into their heads.

*Interviewer A.B.—April 20 1969.*



