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Divided on unity: the competing strategies of the republican and nationalist movements during the Northern Irish Troubles

Matthew James Roche
University at Albany, State University of New York, mroche@albany.edu

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DIVIDED ON UNITY:
THE COMPETING STRATEGIES OF THE REPUBLICAN
AND NATIONALIST MOVEMENTS DURING
THE NORTHERN IRISH TROUBLES

By

Matthew J. Roche

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ABSTRACT

This study will cover many different aspects of the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland. For scholarly convenience, many place the Troubles within the period 1969-1998. This study will assume a slightly different scope, working within the period that laid down the causes of both the beginning and end of the conflict. Thus, the period of study will fall within the parameters 1956-1986. The primary focus will trace the evolving and interconnected roles of militant republicanism and constitutional nationalism during this period, examining their respective impact on the dynamics of the conflict.

The Social-Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), the successors to the failed Nationalist Party, and Sinn Fein, the political wing of militant republicanism, vied for the leadership of the Catholic community of Northern Ireland throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. For the greater part of the Troubles, the two sides were bitter enemies.

The SDLP saw Northern Ireland as a broken state that was fundamentally corrupt. While they were willing to recognize the legitimacy of the state of Northern Ireland, they felt compelled to address the gross inequities – in terms of civil rights, policing, employment, political representation, and housing - which existed between Catholics and Protestants. Their position was that uniting the island was the best solution to redress the ills of the North. They
were, above all, fundamentally opposed to violence in the pursuit of a united Ireland.

During the Troubles, militant republicanism, dominated by the Provisional IRA (PIRA) and Sinn Fein, held a radically different view of the situation in the North. Great Britain was seen as a neo-colonial oppressor who had imposed an artificial partition of Ireland through physical force. This starting point produced a position that rendered the state of Northern Ireland, and its institutions, illegitimate. Violence, republicans argued, was the only policy that the British Government seemed to understand, and the only one that had any realistic chance of uniting Ireland.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, garnered support for the policies of constitutional nationalism, particularly with leaders in Dublin, London, and, importantly, the United States. He committed those leaders to a position which necessitated the negotiation of a new political situation in the North. He was also instrumental in getting all sides to publicly condemn any group who promoted their own political agenda through the use of armed force.

The republican movement’s path to peace, on the other hand, was indeed long and winding. Much of the credit for the politicization of the movement must go to Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein’s leader. The seeds of the peace process were truly sewn when Adams elevated Sinn Fein to a position of dominance
over the PIRA. In the end, this study will attempt to shed light upon how the SDLP set the table for peace, but also how Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA came to sit at it.
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I would like to thank my advisor, Professor Peter H. Krosby, for his guidance with my research on Northern Ireland. I am also grateful to my family for supporting me in my work, and in particular, my wife Megan, who assisted me every step along the way. Thanks to my old friend, Ryan Murphy, for introducing me to my cultural heritage and prompting me to explore my roots. I would finally like to thank my grandfather, Frank Maguire, for his assistance in proofreading and editing. Interestingly enough, his namesake proved to be the unwitting catalyst for a sea change in Northern Irish politics.
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INTRODUCTION

With so many hands at play in the fight for Northern Ireland, the conflict was created, and too often dominated, by those who were content with their own narrowly-focused, self-serving ideologies and motivations. The search for objectivity and a realistic understanding of the nature of the conflict and those it involved has been a long, arduous process that continues to this day and undoubtedly will into the distant future.

The British government is, in no small part, to blame for the outbreak of the Troubles. The 1920 Act of Ireland agreement that divided the island sowed the seeds for conflict by creating an artificial imbalance of power in Northern Ireland. Ireland as a whole never had the chance to express their right of self-determination; rather, a minority was allowed to dictate the outcome of a settlement at the expense of an overwhelming majority. Furthermore, the Irish government was granted no rights in Northern Ireland at its inception, not even a consultative role, a denial of the fact that roughly one-third of the population pledged allegiance to the government in Dublin rather than that of London.

Once their state was created, Protestant leaders focused on consolidating their power. As a result, Catholics living within Northern Ireland felt an increasing sense of alienation and disillusionment with the state, laying the groundwork for future hostilities between the two communities. No checks were put in place to provide for the protection of a permanent minority. In fact, Stormont moved to perpetuate Protestant ascendancy by abolishing proportional representation in elections, falling out of step with the United Kingdom’s electoral laws. Gerrymandering ensured large pockets of Catholics were
excluded from exercising the power of their vote. Employment practices and housing allocations further exacerbated latent communal tensions throughout the period leading to the Troubles.

The Nationalist Party, the voice of constitutional nationalists, lacked the power necessary to control the radical changes of the 1960s. Content to harp on the issue of partition and partition alone, the Nationalist Party failed in their responsibility to provide protection to their community in the face of growing discrimination and oppression. Catholics desperately needed a party to vigorously pursue the rights being denied them. Even if partition was seen to be the ultimate cause and guarantor of Catholic hardships, the all-or-nothing approach expounded by the Nationalist Party allowed for no incremental steps to be taken towards a better standard of living for the Catholic community. As calls for reform became urgent, and more drastic measures were being considered to garner attention for the cause, the Nationalist Party failed to change as swiftly as the times and were quickly succeeded by a new generation of more ardent, and radical, reformers.

Militant republicans too often took the history of their movement as something to be followed as a religious zealot follows dogma. History set precedents that had to be adhered to with rigidity. While viewing the actions of the past as principles rather than tactics, the movement too often stumbled over its own obstinate outlook. The failure of the republican movement was, for far too long, also a failure to respect the identity of unionists. In the end, the IRA’s military campaign proved itself profoundly contradictory. The theory that the IRA could bomb its way to a united Ireland, at which point unionists –
the supposed imperialist dupes who had proved time and again their resistance to joining such a state - would finally realize their true identity as Irishmen and accept their place in a united Ireland, was confounding to say the least. It is hard to accept how a bombing campaign could in any way convince the Protestant community that they would be a protected minority once consumed into a homogenous Catholic state.

Real progress was not made towards a peaceful solution to the Troubles until the leadership of Northern Ireland, both within and without, was able to put the context of the conflict into a more objective light. This has been a long, exhaustive process which continues to this day and included the necessary arrival at a point of acceptance, for all sides involved, of the existence of two fundamentally distinct traditions within Northern Ireland; the acknowledgement that Dublin did have a legitimate role to play in the North; a dismissal of violence as a means for producing a negotiated settlement; and the belief that Catholics should indeed have equal rights as well as an equal say in the governance of their state. In a country defined by its pervasive boundaries and perpetual mistrust, the ever-elusive search for understanding, cooperation, and ultimate reconciliation, will undoubtedly continue into the distant future.

**Aim of Study**

This study will cover many different aspects of the ‘Troubles’ in Northern Ireland. For scholarly convenience, many place the Troubles within the period 1969-1998. This study will assume a slightly different scope, working within the period that laid down the causes of both the beginning and end of the conflict. Thus, the period of study will fall
within the parameters 1956-1986. The primary focus will trace the evolving and interconnected roles of militant republicanism and constitutional nationalism during this period, examining their respective impact on the dynamics of the conflict.

The Social-Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), the successors to the failed Nationalist Party, and Sinn Fein, the political wing of militant republicanism, vied for the leadership of the Catholic community of Northern Ireland throughout the 1970s and into the 1980s. For the greater part of the Troubles, the two sides were bitter enemies.

The SDLP saw Northern Ireland as a broken state that was fundamentally corrupt. While they were willing to recognize the legitimacy of the state of Northern Ireland, they felt compelled to address the gross inequities – in terms of civil rights, policing, employment, political representation, and housing - which existed between Catholics and Protestants. Their position was that unifying the island was the best solution to redress the ills of the North. The SDLP was also acutely aware of the potentially tenuous position of Protestants in a united Ireland. They therefore sought ways to provide assurances of fair treatment and equal representation should that eventuality come to pass. They were, above all, fundamentally opposed to violence in the pursuit of a united Ireland.

During the Troubles, militant republicanism, dominated by the Provisional IRA (PIRA) and Sinn Fein, held a radically different view of the situation in the North. Great Britain was seen as a neo-colonial oppressor who had imposed an artificial partition of Ireland through physical force. This starting point produced a position that rendered the state of Northern Ireland, and its institutions, illegitimate. As a result, republicans saw violent resistance not only as a preferred method of achieving their aim of uniting
Ireland, but as a right they exercised legitimately. During violent riots in the early years of the Troubles, British troops were seen to have been sent in not as protectors of peace, but as violent occupiers. Violence, republicans argued, was the only policy that the British Government seemed to understand, and the only one that had any realistic chance of uniting Ireland.

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, John Hume, the leader of the SDLP, garnered support for the policies of constitutional nationalism, particularly with leaders in Dublin, London, and, importantly, the United States. He committed those leaders to a position which necessitated the negotiation of a new political situation in the North. He was also instrumental in getting all sides to publicly condemn any group who promoted their own political agenda through the use of armed force. With the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985, a crowning moment for Hume and his party, the PIRA and Sinn Fein were branded illegitimate outcasts as long as they persisted with their guerilla campaign. At that moment, the SDLP stood alone as the legitimate voice of Northern Irish Catholics.

The republican movement’s path to peace, on the other hand, was indeed long and winding. Much of the credit for the politicization of the movement must go to Gerry Adams, Sinn Fein’s leader. Although one can look at the pressure put on the PIRA and Sinn Fein by the Anglo-Irish Agreement to put down their arms and negotiate, it must be noted that Adams set his movement on this course three years earlier through back-channel conversations that explored the possibility, and conditions necessary, for a lasting
peace. With Adams, republicans had a pragmatic leader who was willing to consider any tactic if it led the movement towards its ultimate goal, unification.

Ultimately, Adams saw a movement that was entirely consumed with its military campaign, yet had no political vehicle to capitalize on military victories. Because of their abstentionist tradition, Sinn Fein was not in a position to barter or negotiate a better political settlement, or even a better standard-of-living, for its people. Instead, they fought an all-or-nothing battle with Britain for Northern Ireland, one destined to remain hopelessly locked in stalemate. Through his politicizing of the Provisional IRA and Sinn Fein, Adams set the republicans on an irrevocable course toward ending its military campaign in pursuit of a negotiated settlement. The seeds of the peace process were truly sewn when Adams elevated Sinn Fein to a position of dominance over the PIRA. In the end, this study will attempt to shed light upon how the SDLP set the table for peace, but also how Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA came to sit at it.
PART I – THE SEEDS OF CONFLICT

The IRA’s ‘Mandate for War’

From the moment the Northern Irish state was created in 1921, many within the IRA argued in favor of a border war to end the partition of Ireland. The ultimate aim of republicans was to eradicate the British imposed two-state settlement of Ireland and replace it with a singular, united republic devoid of British interference or influence. As M.L.R. Smith, the author of Fighting for Ireland? The Military Strategy of the Irish Republican Movement, writes, the idea of a border campaign was based on the belief that attacks perpetrated from the South along the border regions would produce an uprising by generating spontaneous public support amongst Catholics on both sides of the divide.

The idea for a border war had various adherents within republicanism from the moment of partition, but attacks planned and perpetrated by the IRA in the decades immediately following partition were largely ineffectual. In the early 1950s, however, the IRA began planning in earnest for a renewed border campaign aimed at destabilizing the Northern border. An opportunity arose in 1951 when the Anti-Partition League (APL), a political party who supported Irish unity through constitutional means alone, dissolved due to a lack of cohesiveness and unity of vision. Thomas Hennessey argues that “the vacuum left by the demise of the APL created an opening for militant nationalism.”¹ Over the next four years “the IRA raided the ammunition stores of a

number of army barracks in Northern Ireland and England and netted a considerable quantity of arms” in preparation for their eventual attack.\(^2\)

In 1955, the IRA attempted to garner political support for their military agenda by contesting elections to Westminster. By having Sinn Fein run under the banner of abstentionism, the IRA’s leadership thought election results would constitute a referendum of support for their method of resistance. In the election, Sinn Fein captured 152,310 votes and won two seats for its abstentionist candidates. This high total can be attributed in large part to the non-participation of the Nationalist Party, who put up no challengers in constituencies where Sinn Fein candidates ran.\(^3\) Phil Clarke and Tom Mitchell, both in prison for arms raids, were the elected representatives of Sinn Fein.\(^4\)

Abstention entailed the rejection of any elected seat awarded to a Sinn Fein representative. One of the party’s longest held and most cherished principles, abstentionism was meant to simultaneously prove public support for Sinn Fein’s political outlook while maintaining opposition to the legitimacy of the elections in which they stood as well as the imposed political establishment. Since partition, Sinn Fein had not formally recognized any of the parliaments that adhered to or acknowledged partition; in effect, Sinn Fein had enacted a self-imposed ban on sitting in any of the seats of power: Leinster House in Dublin, Westminster in London, or Stormont in Belfast. As we will see, abstentionism would prove to be one of the most contentious and divisive issues within


\(^3\) *Ibid.*

\(^4\) Hennessey, 105.
republicanism for the greater part of the Troubles. Its significance in relation to its influence upon the dynamics of the conflict can hardly be overstated.

In any case, the electoral support for Sinn Fein did much to encourage IRA leaders, who interpreted the relatively positive results as a public mandate for renewed armed conflict. The IRA believed that a guerrilla strategy would effectively create a movement that solidified “public support in to a cohesive expression of mass opposition to British involvement in Ireland.” The border campaign, known as Operation Harvest began with high expectations, erupting in December 1956 when 150 IRA men attacked various military and infrastructural targets in Northern Ireland. On December 12 the IRA released this statement following the first attacks:

Spearheaded by Ireland’s freedom fighters, our people have carried the fight to the enemy…Out of this national liberation struggle a new Ireland will emerge, upright and free. In that new Ireland, we shall build a country fit for all our people to live in. That then is our aim: an independent, united, democratic Irish Republic. For this we shall fight until the invader is driven from our soil and victory is ours.

One of the major assumptions made by the planners of Operation Harvest was that the IRA would receive “either the tacit or open backing of the Southern Government”, an assessment that turned out to be incorrect and costly. In fact, just the opposite occurred. The return of Fianna Fail as the majority leader in the Republic following the General Elections of 1957 did much to paralyze the IRA. Eamon DeVelara,

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5 Smith, 69.
6 Hennessey, 101.
8 Hennessey, 101.
leader of the Party, helped squash the campaign by introducing internment on members of the IRA. By September 1958 “nearly all the IRA Army Council, General Headquarters Staff and Sinn Fein executive were in gaol”9, forcing the IRA to call off its planned winter campaign prematurely.

The following October, the general elections saw a marked decrease in support for Sinn Fein, as their candidates received only 73,415 votes, less than half their total of four years previous. As Smith argues, a major reason for the IRA’s failure to sustain support during the interim was that it stated its aims purely in ideological terms, staking claim to a mandate derived from republican history rather than the will of the people. As Hennessey expounds, “before the verdict of the 1959 elections was delivered upon the IRA’s campaign, the movement was making no pretence to justify the continuation of the war with reference to anything else except to the elitist themes of its ideology.”10

The greatest failure of planning was that its leaders made no effort “to retain and nurture nationalist confidence through an effective propaganda offensive in order to explain the motives of the IRA’s strategy.”11 In short, the IRA was concerned more with the rhetoric and ideals of their movement than with any practical objectives. Without tangible gains, the people of Ireland, north and south, had no reason to support the war. The campaign quickly petered out.

On February 5, 1962, the IRA Army Council voted to put an end to Operation Harvest. As summed up by one of its leaders, Ruairí O Brádaigh, this was necessary due

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9 Ibid., 71.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid., 69.
to “the attitude of the general public, whose minds have been distracted from the supreme issue facing the Irish people - the unity and freedom of Ireland.” Hennessey suggests that, in fact, it was O Brádaigh and his colleagues who were distracted and out of touch with what the Catholic community of the North desired and required. Rather than the intangible symbol of a united island, the Catholic minority in the North - facing economic hardship and discrimination in their everyday lives - desired to see improvements to their immediate welfare. The public opinion surveys conducted by Richard Rose during the 1960s reveal just this sentiment.

It was under the new leadership of Cathal Goulding, who was made the IRA’s Chief of Staff in 1962, that the republican movement began to recognize their apparent failings. As Goulding aptly stated, “We hadn’t planned to achieve the freedom of Ireland. We simply planned to fight for the freedom of Ireland…the people had no real knowledge of our objectives…we could never succeed because we never planned to succeed.” By 1962, the IRA was headed toward potential dissolution. The movement not only lacked popular backing, but more importantly lacked men and guns, the most obvious requisites of a military revolution. Gerry Adams claimed in his political manifesto, The Politics of Irish Freedom, that in 1961 the Belfast division of the IRA possessed only twenty-four men and two short-arms.

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14 Smith, 72-73.
Thus began a period of rethink by the leaders of the IRA as to how the movement should proceed. IRA leadership recognized that the military movement, at least for the time being, was dead. During this period of dormancy and self-reflection, internal conflicts began to come to the fore. According to Adams, a cleavage developed between old-school republicans and an emerging “group of young, politically-minded individuals who would become the nucleus of the republican movement for the future.” Adams was of the new guard.

Roy Johnston, political theorist of the IRA, came up with a new comprehensive outlook as to the nature of the conflict by placing it under the classification of a ‘neo-colonialist’ battle.

The theory painted an optimistic picture of a huge potential republican constituency; an image of the Irish masses who subconsciously yearned to be unburdened from the manacles of imperialism and whose revolutionary awareness could be stimulated provided they were given the necessary organizational leadership.

Thus, the early 1960s saw the republican movement transform into a non-violent, yet revolutionary, “socialist organization with an extreme left-wing agenda.”

June 1963 offered the 200th birthday of the father of modern Irish republicanism, Theobald Wolfe Tone. In honor of the occasion, Wolfe Tone Committees began sprouting up around Northern Ireland. Gerry Adams described these committees as “a meeting point for republicans and socialists…providing a platform of ideas and an important

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16 Ibid., 8.
17 Smith, 75.
18 Brian Feeney, Sinn Fein: A Hundred Turbulent Years (Madison: University of Wisconsin, 2002), 225.
gathering point for anti-imperialist opinion makers.”¹⁹ These opinion makers argued throughout the early 1960s that class rather than ethnicity or religion could unite Northern Ireland’s communities. By appealing to issues of class, republicans thought they could win the support of both Catholics and Protestants alike.

Republicans espoused a campaign for social reform as a means of breaking down ethnic walls – as well as destabilizing the state – of Northern Ireland. The optimistic view was that a class movement had the potential to unite the people of North and would thus eliminate the need for partition. If this could not be achieved, republicans at least thought they could exploit the potential gains that could be made through a civil rights campaign and thereby undermine the basis upon which Northern Ireland was founded.

Reform attempts have often been dangerous undertakings in divided societies, especially for those with long histories of violent and antagonistic tendencies toward one another. Indeed, in the aftermath of the explosion of violence which occurred as a result of the early civil rights marches between November 1968 and August 1969, the British government appointed a commission to identify the causes for such deep-rooted hostility. The resulting Cameron Report illuminated the mistrust between Protestants and Catholics at a fundamental level as well as the volatility accompanying a perceived threat to the status quo. The Report concluded, “In a community such as Northern Ireland, fears and suspicions are mutual and pervasive and any agitation for change and reform is likely to be regarded as an aspect, and indeed a function, of group antagonism.”²⁰


As Feeney states, the pursuance of cross-community collaboration by republicans was an outright “dangerous policy.” Republican policy makers, he argues, “had no idea of the strength of emotion that existed amongst unionists in the North.”21 This sentiment is further supported and explained by Wallis and Bruce:

Socialism is a particularly precarious ideological base for a Protestant party. It has no honoured place in the history of Protestant politics, it plays a major part in the litany of contemporary republicanism, and most socialists outside Ulster favour Irish nationalism. To promote socialism, therefore, is to undermine what is distinctive about loyalism and the basis for a sustained refusal to join a united Ireland.22

As we will see, the results of this new strategy did indeed threaten Ulster unionists and plunged Northern Ireland into a period of sustained violence for years to come.

**Catholic Alienation**

Republicans represented only a small strand of a much larger movement amongst Northern Catholics, a movement primarily aimed at pressing for civil rights and social equality. The goal expressed by the vast majority of Catholics who demonstrated and agitated was not for that of a united Ireland. In fact, Rose’s Loyalty survey of 1967 showed that roughly one-third of Catholics favored the constitutional relationship between Northern Ireland and the rest of the United Kingdom.23 Most Catholics sought practical gains that could bring about a better standard of living.

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21 Feeney, 237.


There is today a wealth of documentation pointing to systematic discrimination and disenfranchisement of Catholics in Northern Ireland from the state’s inception until the early 1960s. Policies intended to marginalize the Catholic community were in place in the political, economic, and social spheres of society. As a result, politically moderate Catholics began agitating for comprehensive and far-reaching reforms. The British-appointed Cameron Report lends legitimacy to the Catholic efforts of this time by highlighting the inequities that existed.

To begin with, unionists manipulated electoral boundaries to favor their leaders and increase their political representation in a number of ways. “When the British government introduced universal suffrage, abolishing the restricted franchise for local government in 1945, the Stormont government secured the exclusion of the six counties from the provisions of the legislation.”24 This policy had the effect of “excluding sub-tenants, lodgers, servants and children over twenty-one who were living at home.”25 This policy affected Catholics in far greater numbers than Protestants. As the Cameron Report explained, this policy “excluded from the local government franchise about one-quarter of those entitled to vote at Stormont elections.”26

Unionists also increased their majority by granting Belfast’s Queens University four seats at Stormont, as well as granting up to six-votes for select businesses and corporations for both local and Stormont elections. To be sure, granting seats to universities is not a discriminatory policy in and of itself, nor is it exclusive to Northern

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26 Ibid.
Ireland. However, Queen’s University exclusively put forth Protestant representatives, creating an artificial imbalance; this law was also out of step with English law, where the granting of university seats was abolished in 1948. Given the situation in Northern Ireland, this policy is best interpreted as one meant to perpetuate Protestant ascendancy.

On the local level, egregious discrepancies existed in relation to population makeup and electoral representation. The Cameron Report described this imbalance:

In several constituencies it is apparent that disproportionate representation occurred on the local scene, always with an outcome favorable to Protestants. In examination of the 1961 Population census, there were 3,139 adult Roman Catholics and 2,798 Protestants, respectively, within Country Armagh Urban District. Catholics returned only 8 seats while Protestants secured 12. This trend is consistent in two wards of Dungannon, where Protestants have majority in its two districts of 147 and 196, but after elections occupied two-thirds of the seats within the county.

The report continues by explaining similar election outcomes in Londonderry County Borough in 1967:

Within the North Ward there were 2,530 Catholic voters and 3,946 Protestant voters, with an outcome that returned all 8 seats to unionist candidates. In the Waterside Ward, there were 1,852 Catholics and 3,697 Protestant voters, resulting in Protestants winning all seats. In the South Ward, most blatant and egregious of all electoral discrimination, Catholics held an overwhelming majority, with 10,047 voters while Protestants had only 8,781 voters; Protestants, once again, swept all eight seats.

Paul F. Power’s article, “Civil Protest in Northern Ireland” additionally pointed out that within “segregated Derry City” – which was 67% Catholic - the “ward boundaries were

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redrawn under Unionist control as recently as 1966, with the result that 10,274 Unionist votes elected 16 council men and 20,102 anti-Unionist votes elected 8.”\(^{30}\) Indeed, Catholics, who comprised roughly one-third of the population of Northern Ireland, controlled only 11 of the 73 local authorities in Northern Ireland.\(^{31}\)

Once in office, Unionist leaders took additional steps to consolidate their power. The Cameron Report explained that “Unionists used and have continued to use the electoral majority thus created to favour Protestant or Unionist supporters in making public appointments – particularly those of senior officials – and in manipulating housing allocations for political and sectarian ends.”\(^{32}\)

Houses were built and allocated in such a way that they will not disturb the political balance. In Londonderry County Borough a vast programme has been carried out in the South Ward – and Catholics have been re-housed there almost exclusively. In recent years housing programmes were declined because the Corporation refused to face the political effects of boundary extension, even though this was recommended by all its senior officials. At the same time there have been many cases where councils have withheld planning permission, or caused needless delays, where they believed a housing project would be to their electoral disadvantage.\(^{33}\)

In light of these considerations, it is not surprising that Derry was a city rife with discontented Catholics. According to Brendan Lynn, Derry City had over “50,000 people

\(^{30}\) Power, 231.

\(^{31}\) Ibid, 114.

\(^{32}\) “Disturbances in Northern Ireland,” 1: 10.

\(^{33}\) “Disturbances in Northern Ireland,” 10: 139-140.
crammed into an area of just over 2,000 acres within a city boundary that had been unchanged for a century and quarter.”

Within the economic domain the theme remains the same, with Catholics facing the brunt of hardship. As Hewitt points out,

About half the Catholics live in areas where the unemployment rate is above the average for the province as a whole, as compared to about one quarter of the Protestants. In both the high unemployment areas and the low unemployment areas Catholics were twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestants.

The Cameron Report also points out that Catholics in Londonderry were underrepresented in the upper strata of employment, namely in administrative, clerical and technical jobs. Indeed, “out of the ten best-paid posts only one was held by a Catholic.”

McAllister notes that in “1962 Barritt and Carter discovered that Catholic representation in the post of Staff Officer and above had not changed since 1927, holding steady at 6 percent.”

In addition to enduring higher unemployment and lower paying jobs, Catholics were singled out and specifically excluded from jobs and offices. In an attempt to gain votes in the St. George district of Belfast in 1961, an election leaflet read as follows:

“Employ over 70 people and have NEVER employed A ROMAN CATHOLIC.”

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38 Hennessey, 114.
story related by Hennessey, one man, Patrick Shea, “was held for many years at the rank of principal officer, and his permanent secretary finally told him ‘because you are a Roman Catholic you may never get any further promotion.’”

The guarantor of Protestant supremacy was of course the all-Protestant police Force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), as well as the exclusively Protestant reserve force, the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC). Unionists also had the draconian Civil Authorities Act (Special Powers) to fall back on during times of unrest. Under the Act,

The Civil Authority and the RUC were empowered to arrest without warrant; imprison without charge or trial and deny recourse to a court of law or to Habeas Corpus; enter and search homes without warrant; declare a curfew and prohibit meetings, assemblies, fairs, markets and processions; permit flogging as punishment; deny claim to trial by jury; arrest person desired to examine as witness, forcibly detain them and compel them to answer questions, under penalties, even if answers may incriminate them.

Interestingly, John Vorster, the South African Minister for Justice, once commented in 1963 that he “would be willing to exchange all the legislation of that sort [Coercion Acts] for one clause of the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act.”

These examples of systematic discrimination and outright oppression provide a contextual understanding for the real and legitimate discontent of Catholics throughout the decades of the North’s existence. Calls for change were coming from many directions by the mid-1960s; as a liberal, reform-seeking Government came to the fore in 1963

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39 Ibid., 133.


41 Ibid., 21.
under the leadership of Captain Terence O’Neill, civil rights agitators saw a ripe opportunity to push their reform agenda.

**Caution of the Old; Discontent of the New**

For constitutional nationalists, the early 1960s offered opportunities to confront the ascendant Unionist Party and fight for minority rights. However, the Nationalist Party, the voice of constitutional Catholics, failed to grasp the opportunities at hand during this time. By the end of the decade the Nationalist Party became completely ineffectual in Northern politics and shortly thereafter dissolved. The vacuum created as a result – in terms of political power and communal influence – became a major factor in, and one of the leading causes of, the outbreak of violence in 1968 and 1969. The complete lack of established, moderate Catholic leadership opened the door for radical elements to assume power during that crucial period which otherwise may not have been possible.

In a parallel sense, the Nationalist Party was guilty of committing the same paradigmatic mistake as the IRA by focusing solely on the supreme question of Irish unity at the expense of practical politics. As McAllister points out,

> There was the obsession with partition which excluded all other issues from political debate, regardless of how seriously they affected the Catholic community. Thus such pressing issues as religious discrimination, the housing shortage and educational policy were rarely raised by Nationalist MPs.\(^{42}\)

\(^{42}\) McAllister, 17.
The party frequently abstained from parliamentary sessions and lacked the unity and
organization necessary to effectively mobilize popular support for their policies. In fact,
as McAllister notes, “until November 1964, the party never issued any clear statement of
policy.”43 Since the time of partition, the Nationalist Party successfully passed only one
piece of legislation: The Wild Birds Act of 1931.44

In the early 1960s, The Nationalist Party was handed a golden opportunity to
present the plight of their people but showed ineptitude instead. An example of this was
in a televised debate over religious discrimination between Nationalist MP James
O’Reilly and Brian Faulkner, a leading unionist politician and future Prime Minister of
the North. O’Reilly was routed in what should have been a major propaganda victory.
Brendan Lynn argues that O’Reilly showed a lack of preparedness and documentation
when presenting his case, thereby allowing Faulkner the chance to dismiss what should
have been concrete proof of discrimination as mere embellished, unsubstantiated
allegations.45

In response to this lost opportunity as well as to the growing threat of newly
forming nationalist parties, Eddie McAteer, leader of the Nationalist Party, embarked on a
plan to bolster his party’s position as the ascendant voice of opposition to unionism. In
November, the party announced that the Nationalist Party was ready to face head-on the
problems facing the nationalist community. The party published its 39 Points, a policy
document that sought reforms to the state. Among other things, the 39 Points sought a

43 Ibid.
45 Lynn, 3.
revocation of the Special Powers Act, the appointment of an ombudsman to investigate claims of discrimination, and the disbandment of the Ulster Special Constabulary.46

On February 2, 1965, McAteer announced that the Nationalist Party would finally take up the role as official opposition at Stormont. The fact that this decision took such a long time to come about shows the extent to which the leadership was caught up in the politics of partition. Nonetheless, this policy was certainly a step in the right direction and was welcomed by the nationalist community. The decision to become the official opposition signaled a thaw in Anglo-Irish relations, but was also a response to the young, ambitious, and demanding class of Catholics that emerged in the early 1960s.

Among the emergent was the think-tank National Unity, a movement established in 1959 designed “to encourage debate among disparate political Catholic opposition groups in Northern Ireland.”47 The forum was meant to establish meaningful debate that would challenge the stagnant policies of Northern nationalism. Although National Unity ultimately did not benefit Catholics in any tangible way, it can be seen as a turning point of nationalist politics, signifying the fledgling search for new political alternatives which came about in the coming decade.

What eventually emerged in the 1960s was a young class of Catholics who were better educated and more forthcoming and aggressive in seeking redress for the ills befallen their community than their forebears. The Education Act of 1947 granted Catholics an opportunity to seek higher education not previously afforded to most in their

46 Ibid, 8.

communities. McAllister notes, “in the 17 years following the 1947 Act the number of pupils in grant-aided schools increased by 39 percent, while the total number of pupils in secondary education as a whole doubled between 1946 and 1952 alone.”

Among those who benefited from the post-war education reforms was John Hume, a schoolteacher who graduated from Maynooth College – an accomplishment attributable to said newfound educational opportunities. Hume was highly critical of the Nationalist Party, writing two articles, both entitled “The Northern Catholic”, in which he lamented the party’s policies. Hume assessed the Nationalist position: “Weak opposition leads to corrupt government. Nationalists in opposition have no way been constructive. They have…been loud in their demands for rights, but they have remained silent and inactive about their duties.” Hume briefly associated himself with the Nationalists but resigned in frustration at the party’s inability to (in his words) “grasp the nettle…and give an image of vigour.”

The leadership of the Nationalist Party foundered while new parties with more practical policies began to assert themselves. The National Democratic Party (NDP) was established in 1965 and can be seen to have introduced many of the principles of Irish nationalism which have become the corner-stone of its modern policy. The NDP was created as an alternative to the Nationalist Party by Catholics who championed the cause of reform above unity.

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48 McAllister, 6.
49 Lynn, 11.
50 Ibid.
In the NDP’s manifesto one can see the seeds of policy planted for what eventually became the Social Democratic and Labour Party’s (SDLP) position on a number of fundamental issues. To begin with, the NDP was the first nationalist party to introduce the principle of consent into the debate on unity, stating it ‘would negotiate for re-unification only if the majority of the people in the North wanted it.’ Furthermore, the party sought a repeal of the Special Powers Act, a Bill of Rights for Northern Irish citizens, a Council of Ireland that would ‘promote harmonious cross-border relations and economic development between North and South,’ and proportional representation in all elections in Northern Ireland. As we will see, these became the guiding principles of the SDLP in the decades to follow.

The NDP did not seek to overthrow the Nationalist Party but merely to invigorate the political process to bring about better representation of Catholics at Stormont. The two parties had an electoral pact whereby the NDP would not stand for election in constituencies where a Nationalist candidate already stood. For the time being, the ball was still in the court of the Nationalist Party. Upon entering Stormont as official opposition in February of 1965, Eddie McAteer proclaimed, ‘The next exercise will be to establish normal political machinery with membership constituency bodies and annual conferences.’ While McAteer’s party plodded along, still searching for internal organization, the pace of the reform movement accelerated, eventually turning into a civil

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51 Murray and Tonge, 9.
52 Ibid., 10.
53 Ibid., 8.
54 Lynn, 8.
rights campaign based on non-violent resistance; the Nationalist Party would be hard
pressed to keep up with the politics of the street as events rapidly unfolded in the coming
years.

**The Civil Rights Movement**

When Captain Terence O’Neill began his tenure as Prime Minister of Northern
Ireland in March of 1963, he sought to usher in a period of reform to rejuvenate a society
lagging behind the rest of the United Kingdom both economically and socially. O’Neill’s
ascent, coupled with the election of Labour Party’s Harold Wilson at Westminster the
following October, signaled amongst Catholics a cause for optimism for a renewed
possibility of securing needed reforms. Such optimism was perhaps ill-founded, as
O’Neill proved to have no real strategy for improving community relations or reforming
the deeply divided state. In many ways, O’Neill’s promises served only to raise hopes and
expectations that could not be fulfilled, thereby fostering an atmosphere of
disillusionment and unrest.

O’Neill believed that he could promote economic gains for all and could fully
integrate Catholics into the Northern Irish state. In his work entitled *Ulster at the
Crossroads*, O’Neill argued that his government should always work to show Catholics
‘that loyalty to Britain carries its reward in the form of a fuller, richer life.’55 O’Neill
wanted to push the historical divisions out of the decision-making process and focus on a
new beginning. When this occurred, O’Neill was confident “that everyone could share

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the new prosperity”, that eventually “Catholics could also work for the Unionist Party and not just for ‘their own’."\textsuperscript{56}

O’Neill quickly brought about positive developments to Northern Ireland, reducing unemployment from the 15-20 percent range of the 1950s to a 5-8 percent level by the mid-1960s.\textsuperscript{57} There was of course, a strong proclivity for new businesses to locate east of the River Bann, an area predominately Protestant. Brian Faulkner also managed to gain new investments into the province between 1963 and 1969, persuading 104 new companies to invest in the North. However, 70 percent of these new businesses were placed east of the Bann.\textsuperscript{58}

If the government was as serious as they claimed about cross-community cooperation, no opportunity existed for gains as that which was presented by the “University for Derry” committee. The committee, of which John Hume was a key figure, sought to convince the Lockwood Committee to establish a new university within Derry. Derry was largely Catholic in makeup and was increasingly a hot-bed for Catholic discontent of Stormont policies.

The placement of the university within Derry had the potential to convince Derry’s Catholics that gains were being made on their behalf. According to Lynn, Derry’s recent history had suggested otherwise.

Examples had included the Benson Report which proposed that the Great Northern and LMS railways should be cut from Derry so ending the city’s direct train routes to Dublin and Belfast; the government’s decision to

\textsuperscript{56} Sarah Nelson, \textit{Ulster’s Uncertain Defenders}. (Belfast: Appletree Press, 1984), 50.
\textsuperscript{57} Power, 231.
\textsuperscript{58} Diarmaid Ferriter, \textit{The Transformation of Ireland} (New York: Ferriter, 2004), 612.
concentrate its economic development plan around the building of a new city between Lurgan and Portadown; or the siting by the Michelin Tire Company of their new factory in Ballymena rather than Derry.\textsuperscript{59}

This is not to say that these policies were pushed ahead as anti-Catholic by design; what’s more important to understand is the way in which they were perceived by Northern Catholics and what that perception led to.

The “University for Derry” committee was a rare opportunity for Catholics and Protestants to work toward something constructive and economically productive. The committee co-opted both communities common pursuit of knowledge. Eddie McAteer and Gerald Glover, arch-Unionist, both shared the platform at the Guildhall rally in February of 1965, attended by thousands. McAteer also worked with Mayor Albert Anderson. When the Lockwood Report recommended that the new university be placed in Coleraine, the committee motorcaded to Stormont to protest. An estimated 25,000 people attended.

The failure of this project - which could have been used as a template for future cross-community cooperation in the future - was a major disappointment to Hume and his associates. As Lynn explains, “for the Catholic population of the city the university issue was part of a much wider question, namely the attitude of the Stormont government towards Derry and its future development.”\textsuperscript{60} John Hume conveyed the same thinking,

The university decision electrified the people on the nationalist side, and I think was really the spark that ignited the civil rights movement, though I suppose nobody could have articulated it in those terms then. And when

\textsuperscript{59} Lynn, 21.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 12.
the university went to Coleraine, the chance of orderly change in Northern Ireland disappeared.61

Indeed, civil rights groups began appearing throughout Northern Ireland shortly after the university decision was made. The majority of those involved in the civil rights campaign were a part of Hume’s generation, a growing body of young, educated, and articulate, middle class Catholics “with expectations of being able to rise socially”, who “found it difficult to accept the status quo” and who were “well able to state their case on television.”62

In the early 1960s, these agitators formed small civil rights groups, such as the Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ) and the Derry Citizens Action Committee (DCAC). In 1967, these different strands came together under one umbrella organization, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). The aims of this organization, expounded in the association’s constitution, included:

Universal franchise in local government elections in line with the rest of the United Kingdom; a redrawing of electoral boundaries by an independent commission to ensure fair representation; a points system for housing which would ensure fair allocation; a repeal of the Special Powers Act; disbanding of the Ulster Special Constabulary.63

These aims were certainly not revolutionary in aim. However, the makeup of the organization caused alarm amongst loyalists.

Because the NICRA was open to anyone, the movement “included persons of known extreme Republican views as well as members of the Northern Ireland Liberal and

61 Ibid., 12.
Labour Parties.”64 As Smith demonstrates, republicans were actually “instrumental in setting up NICRA itself, though they did not control the Association and remained a minority faction within it.”65 When the civil rights movement began in earnest in the summer of 1968 it “was composed of those who, like the IRA, had revolutionary aims but were in a minority and those who, like the CSJ, were reformist who were in the ascendancy.”66 These two strands of Catholic Northern Ireland used the same tactical agitation toward dramatically different ends.

As mentioned previously, involvement in the civil rights movement fit in nicely within the IRA’s newfound policy of undermining the state through an extreme leftwing, non-violent agenda. IRA Chief of Staff Cathal Goulding, and other republican leaders, espoused the belief that unionists were merely misguided and manipulated by their imperialist leaders. Once they were “released from their sectarian blinkers, Protestant workers would combine with their Catholic brethren collectively to resist British colonial rule.”67

This outlook, of course, demonstrated an ignorant view of Protestant motivation and intelligence. To believe that the Protestants of Northern Ireland were duped into their obstinate, unwavering stance against Irish unity by their British overlords denies many historical facts. In the early part of the twentieth century, loyalists organized an army of close to 150,000 to take up arms in their own defense should Westminster not make

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64 Ibid., 15: 186.
65 Smith, 81.
66 Hennessey, 137.
67 Smith, 81.
“special provision” for their privileged position in Ireland. This was not a community that mindlessly followed London’s lead, but one that was fiercely committed to their Britishness within Ireland independent of outside influence.

No one personified Ulster’s ultra-loyalist character more than the Reverend Dr. Ian Paisley. Paisley, a right-wing loyalist, agitated against the Roman Catholic Church, and “consistently challenged official Unionism, as well as republicanism and moderate forces.” Paisley dominated the loyalist political scene from the outbreak of the Troubles. Tim Pat Coogan has credited Paisley for doing “more damage to Protestant hegemony than they [the IRA] hoped to do.”

Paisley occasionally appears to descend from post-Reformation Europe. Judging by the nature of the origins of the conflict, this can certainly serve to strike a nerve within the Protestant population. Paisley has repeatedly denounced Roman Popery and Catholicism in general. Paisley once admitted he felt sorry for “Catholic mothers who have to go and prostitute themselves before bachelor priests.” He has also proclaimed, “Remember—it is not the system we must attack but the people [emphasis mine] —the people who represent the Anti-Christ in our midst!” Paisley’s ability to divide Protestants and Catholics has been well documented throughout the history of the Troubles.

Paisley made his way onto the Northern Irish scene by founding the Free Presbyterian Church in the Ravenhill Road area of Belfast in 1951. By the early 1960s he began to make his mark against republicans, ecumenicists, and moderate unionists.

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68 Nelson, 54.

When, in 1959, Prime Minister Lord Brookeborough failed to expel two MPs "who suggested that Unionist Party membership be open to Catholics"\textsuperscript{70}, Paisley denounced Brookeborough’s conciliatory attitude. In 1963 he led over a thousand marchers “to protest against the decision by the Lord Mayor of Belfast to half-mast the Union Jack on City Hall to mark the death of Pope John XXIII.”\textsuperscript{71} The following year, Paisley “led thousands of followers in protest at the display of a tricolour by a Sinn Féin candidate in the 1964 election” as it violated the 1954 Flags and Emblems Act. Thirty people were injured in the riot that ensued. That was to be the first of many melees in which Paisley occupied a prominent role in the incipient violence.

Paisley published the “virulently anti-Catholic” \textit{Protestant Telegraph} in 1966, known for its anti-papal stance as well its condemnations of O’Neill’s ‘appeasing policies.’\textsuperscript{72} Whereas O’Neill spoke “particularly for a growing number of middle class Protestants who found themselves unable to identify with traditional views”\textsuperscript{73}, the bulwark of support for Paisley’s politics tended to be found most notably “in the Belfast working class.”\textsuperscript{74} Paisley did not shy away from creating such a rift in unionist society, but rather worked to pronounce and exploit such differences to make O’Neill’s position untenable. “Thus one role of Paisley’s movement was to articulate the social grievances of people left out of the new affluence, squeezed on one side by the middle class, on the

\textsuperscript{70} \textit{Ibid.}, 55.

\textsuperscript{71} Hennessey, 138.

\textsuperscript{72} Nelson, 55.

\textsuperscript{73} \textit{Ibid.}, 51.

\textsuperscript{74} Hennessey, 139.
other side by Catholics.”75 Indeed, Paisley appealed to poorer Protestants because he fought to maintain their superiority over Catholics. “For those Protestants who were close to the bottom of the economic heap, it was comforting to know that Catholics as a class were worse off…Hence, Protestants – even the poorest – were in some sense ‘better.’”76

Paisley’s supporters presented an obvious affront to the aims of O’Neill and to the republican aims of a united working class. Paisley’s mentality that Ulster was constantly “under siege” is not altogether ill-founded when approaching the Northern Irish problem from the position of a loyal Ulsterman – nor is it uncommon. Even if Protestant rights were to be safeguarded if they were suddenly subsumed into an overwhelming Catholic, united Ireland, much of the traditional loyalist identity would be lost.

As Beckett argues, “Two factors, not unusual in such a situation, brought about the reversal of this hopeful trend” that O’Neill had brought to the state, “impatience on one side and fear on the other.”77 The leaders of the NICRA were not content to sit back and wait as O’Neill slowly tried to implement his strategy. Instead, the NICRA employed many of the same strategies used in America’s civil rights movement to speed up the reform process, using “sit-ins, processions, songs and publications – all conducted in the full view of television cameras and pressmen.”78

75 Nelson, 53.
76 Wallis and Bruce, 304.
The first civil rights march (mentioned previously in the introduction), which began in Dungannon and proceeded to Coalisland, occurred on August 24, 1968, in protest of the housing policy in the area. The march was in response to the allocation of a house in Caledon village in June to a 19-year old Protestant girl instead of a Catholic family of five that was already squatting there.

Immediately following this housing decision, Austin Currie, a Nationalist MP, squatted in the house to protest. He and others were forcibly dragged out of the house by the RUC, of which included the young lady’s brother, in front of television cameras, sparking indignation amongst Catholics and Nationalists alike. The first march, attended by roughly 1,500 people, proceeded and ended peacefully, but marked the effective beginning of a series of marches that continued for years.

Austin Currie was growing increasingly frustrated with his party and their inability to secure a reform package. Currie was elected MP of East Tyrone at only 24 years of age, representing the emerging youth as well as the radical new approach to dealing with discrimination – attributable qualities not found within those of the Nationalist Party. Currie became involved in the housing issue in 1967 and became convinced that civil disobedience was the only means of affecting change for his constituents. Currie explained that the Caledon squat was a way of showing the ‘growing desperation and frustration’ amongst Catholics throughout the North.

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80 McAllister, 26.
81 Lynn, 25.
Currie pushed ahead while McAteer worked through higher channels of government. McAteer met muted responses. In July, McAteer asked for a meeting with O’Neill and Wilson to stress ‘the anxious position which is fermenting’. When he contacted the Northern Ireland Office in London he was shooed away. ‘Such as discrimination, plural voting or gerrymandering, these areas remain the sole responsibility of Stormont’ – was the response on a number of occasions.

Even after receiving these responses, McAteer was unwilling to pledge his party to a policy of non-violent disobedience. At a conference in which the motion on the matter was presented, the Party claimed itself ‘insufficiently informed’ and ‘suggested it be sent back to the Executive with the direction to examine it fully and report back to a Special Conference in six months.” Currie effectively dissociated himself with the Nationalist Party following this decision, summing up the party’s position: ‘We want justice for our people, but we do not want it all that much’.

The next march to take place was slated for October 5 and this time the simmering city of Londonderry was chosen. The route chosen was proposed to end inside the Diamond, the central part of the city, within its walled section. The significance of this area to Protestants can hardly be overstated; it was the place in which the Protestants held back Catholics led by James VII and II in the late seventeenth century. The decision to end the march inside the Diamond was “designed to symbolize

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82 Ibid., 28.
83 Ibid.
84 “Disturbances in Northern Ireland,” 4: 40.
the claim of the Civil Rights Association to be non-sectarian, and neither Unionist nor Nationalist."\textsuperscript{85}

Loyalists, of course, saw this decision in an entirely different light, likening the march more to an invasion than a peaceful procession. Under Section 2 of the Public Order Act, the head constable of the RUC has the right to limit any march that was deemed to have a reasonable chance of inciting violence. Knowing this, the Apprentice Boys, a loyalist organization, announced that they would be holding an ‘Annual Initiation Ceremony’, where they would proceed from the Diamond to the Apprentice Boys Memorial Hall, on the same day. Thus, Minister of Home Affairs William Craig had the grounds on which to ban the NICRA march, which he did on October 3. The NICRA, however, persisted.\textsuperscript{86}

Whereas the NICRA demonstrators were unarmed and had even brought along a number of MPs, including Gerry Fitt, to observe and participate in a peaceful march, loyalists “were armed with cudgels of all kinds, some of which were studded with nails.”\textsuperscript{87} At Duke Street, the RUC attempted to break up the march before a riot broke out. This measure was unsuccessful, and civil rights marchers were attacked. “The whole scene was captured by a camera crew from RTE, whose film also screened on British TV and around the world. So was an interview with a blood-spattered Fitt.”\textsuperscript{88} In fact, Gerry Adams confided that “the Belfast republicans had been instructed in the event of the

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{86} Ibid., 4: 41.

\textsuperscript{87} Ibid., 8: 83.

\textsuperscript{88} Ed Moloney, \textit{The Secret History of the IRA} (London: Penguin, 2002), 64.
parade being halted by police cordons to push leading nationalist politicians…into police ranks."89 This was done so that MPs could see first-hand the violent, repressive reaction of loyalists in the face of a peaceful civil rights procession.

In the aftermath of October 5, tensions ran high throughout the North. Many were shocked by the brutality they had witnessed on television. Two days after the incident, Queen’s University’s students and faculty gathered together and organized a new body. This new Civil Rights organization took the name of People’s Democracy (PD). PD immediately radicalized the civil rights movement. PD issued their Manifesto in February of 1969, in which their stated aims were scarcely different from the aims of NICRA - begging the question as to why the group was necessary in the first place.

Whereas Major James Chichester-Clarke, who was to become Prime Minister in 1969, wrongfully overstated his argument when he denounced the entire civil rights movement as a ‘conspiracy of forces seeking to overthrow a Government democratically elected by a large majority’90, with PD he could have made a strong case. PD repeatedly exacerbated already tense situations. Its forceful activities and lack of scruples in member admittance quickly served to eliminate moderate members from its ranks, leaving a core component of radicals in control. The Cameron Report concluded that “many of its leading and influential members were an extremist element in the Civil Rights movement.”91 The radical elements of PD, combined with the reactionary

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90 Hennessey, 165.

elements of Paisley and his supporters, sent the North into a violent tailspin from which it would not soon recover.

Following the violence of October 5th, O’Neill’s Government, “in response to British pressure”, issued a five-point reform program to cool rising tensions. The reform agenda sought to immediately improve the situation in Northern Ireland through the enactment of the following measures: creating a new system for the allocation of houses, which included a points system; objectively investigating the claims of grievances amongst all citizens with a non-partisan commissioner; implementing a Londonderry Area Plan, which was designed to develop the area’s economy through large investment, thereby increasing jobs and housing opportunities; reform of the local government, including elimination of the university and company voting privileges; a permanent boundary commission to review the distribution of seats at elections to the House of Commons; and the withdrawal of the policies contained within the Special Powers Act, which were in conflict with international standards for security, as soon as the situation in Northern Ireland returned to one of peace and order.92

As we know, these declarations corresponded to the grievances that Catholics were facing as well as the reforms they were demanding. Following this conciliatory gesture, the NICRA “called off its campaign for a while to encourage a warming of relations.”93 The Nationalist Party, who had changed their policy on civil disobedience at the promised party conference in October, likewise called for a period of calm to allow for reform implementation. O’Neill’s concession must have been an eye-opening

93 Darby, 105.
experience for the Nationalist Party. In just a few short months, civil rights marches had procured more for Catholics in Northern Ireland than the party had in its entire existence.94

PD however, “responded to O’Neill’s package with scorn” and instead pushed for further reforms.95 O’Neill’s reforms also did much to alienate loyalists as well, “who resented London interference”.96 Subsequently, “the Unionist Party began to divide into O’Neillites and opponents” - the most notable of whom was Ian Paisley. Faulkner, who was also growing more opposed to O’Neill, blamed the public nature of O’Neill’s reform push as being a major part of the problem, as it played right into the hands of Paisley who sought to exploit Protestant insecurity at the prospects of wide-spread reform. A fissure in the monolithic unionist façade was developing.

Following additional violence on November 23 and 30 in Dungannon and Armagh, respectively - in which Paisley played a major role in planning and carrying out violent attacks on civil right marchers - O’Neill took to the airwaves to appeal to the people of Northern Ireland to maintain order and calm.97 The NICRA once again responded by concluding that they would cease all marches until January 11th. However, PD remained unimpressed. They announced that they would carry out a long march beginning on January 1st, departing from Belfast and finishing in Londonderry on the 4th.

94 Lynn, 31.
95 Moloney, 65.
96 Hennessey, 144.
Both nationalists and unionists denounced this decision as a deliberate provocation of violence.

The march was designed, in the words of PD leader, Michael Farrell, to upset the status quo, “with the result that the loyalists might back down, the Northern Ireland Government might fall, or the British Government might intervene in Northern Ireland’s affairs, reopening the Irish question after fifty years.”98 As the march neared Derry, the marchers of PD were ambushed on Burntollet bridge by roughly 200 loyalists. The loyalist defenders had made arrangement of all kinds, including building up stockpiles of rocks and other projectiles during the previous day as well as informing all loyalists to wear white arm bands, so as to be able to tell friend from foe.99 Following the attack, vicious riots broke out in Maghera as well as the Bogside of Derry between the RUC and Catholics.100 The Cameron Commission believed that this was the intention of PD all along, “their object was to increase tension, so that in the process a more radical programme could be realized…They saw the march as a calculated martyrdom.”101

98 Hennessey, 152.
100 Moloney, 65.
Extremist Appeasement – Sewing the Seeds of Street Violence

The final year of the decade had begun ominously. O’Neill’s pleas had been ignored and greater violence had ensued with PD’s march on Londonderry. With Northern Ireland on the brink of chaos, O’Neill tried one final effort to regain control of the Unionist Party by suddenly calling for new elections to Stormont to take place at the end of February. O’Neill was at a breaking point; calling an election was his last desperate attempt to shore up support against his critics. Such support would not be forthcoming.

Early in January, O’Neill faced challenges to his authority by both William Craig and Brian Faulkner. After Craig threatened that he was prepared to use any means necessary to prevent Westminster from invoking their right of direct authority under Article 75 of the Government of Ireland Act 1920, O’Neill dismissed Craig from his cabinet. Brian Faulkner also resigned in protest that month, followed by two further resignations before the election. The Unionist Party became even more sharply divided. Many in its ranks called for a change in leadership.102

On the nationalist side, the young, energetic leaders had won the day. John Hume, Ivan Cooper, and Paddy O’Hanlon, all future founders of the SDLP, won over their Nationalist counterparts in the general election, serving notice that there was a

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changing of the guard in nationalist politics.\(^{103}\) Hume had stood against McAteer in the race for Foyle. Hume’s decisive victory symbolized a much larger shift taking place within nationalism. In Hume’s election manifesto he declared the principles of the new leadership:

The movement must provide…strong and energetic opposition to conservatism…pursuing radical, social and economic policies. The movement must be completely non-sectarian and must root out a fundamental evil in our society, sectarian division. The movement must be committed to the ideal that the future of Northern Ireland should be decided by its people, and no constitutional changes accepted except by the consent of the people.\(^{104}\)

With that, Hume sounded the call for a new party to emerge.

On March 31, extreme loyalists sought to undermine O’Neill’s tenuous position through an act of sabotage. Initially thought to be the work of the IRA, this loyalist group, later identified as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), set off explosions at electricity and water installations outside of Belfast to ‘undermine confidence in the government of Captain O’Neill.’\(^{105}\) In April, Chichester-Clarke quit O’Neill’s cabinet “in protest of the prime minister’s policies,” forcing “an exhausted O’Neill” into resignation on April 28.\(^{106}\) Chichester-Clarke subsequently succeeded O’Neill as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland on May 1, defeating Faulkner by a single vote.

\(^{103}\) McAllister, 22.

\(^{104}\) Lynn, 35.


\(^{106}\) Moloney, 65.
As spring gave way to summer, so began the most antagonistic time of year for Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland. The Protestant marching season – celebrating, among other things, the victory in 1690 of the Protestant King William III over the Catholic King, James II – extends from June to August. The marches went on as planned in the summer of 1969, despite serious warning signs. As clashes began occurring in greater frequency and intensity throughout June and July, the writing was on the wall that Northern Ireland was on the verge of collapse. August was the pivotal month, ending any prospects for a successful non-violent civil rights campaign. After the events of the 14th (effective starting date of the Troubles for many historians), Northern Ireland moved into a state of complete community polarization and verged on civil war.

July saw the rioting and forced departure of Catholics living within integrated parts of Belfast. Home invasions and burnouts were provoked by the Shankill Defense Association (SDA), a group formed by a friend of Reverend Ian Paisley. Polarization, of course, was welcomed by Paisley. The Scarman Tribunal Report, published in 1972, investigated the source of violence in 1969 by interviewing over 400 witnesses to the violence, and concluded that Reverend Paisley’s “actions and speeches must be held largely responsible for the disturbances.”107

Always suspicious of the RUC as a sectarian force, Catholics began to abandon what little confidence they had in the police force as impartial following the events of that summer. Catholics civilians instead were left to organize their own defense. The DCAC, mentioned above as a civil rights organization linked to the NICRA, “was

superseded by a more aggressive body known as the Derry Citizens’ Defense Association (DCDA)."\textsuperscript{108} The main function of the DCDA was to defend the Bogside of Derry. This was done mainly by setting up barricades in streets to prevent loyalist incursions. While the IRA was undoubtedly involved in the setting up of DCDA, Scarman concluded that “they did not start the riots, or plan them; indeed, the evidence is that the IRA was taken by surprise and did less than many of their supporters thought they should have done.”\textsuperscript{109}

The RUC worked in conjunction with the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC) to quell rioting. The USC, also known as the B Specials, have a notorious legacy in Irish history and have been seen by Catholics overwhelmingly as a tool of oppression. The USC has explicit connections with the Orange Order; their lodges are often used as the site of USC drilling and training. Their ranks contained zero Catholics. Scarman also noted that the USC was “neither trained nor equipped for riot control duty.” However, they were continuously used for this function. In one instance, the County Inspector of Dungannon irresponsibly put the USC on riot control duty in the area “without ensuring that there was an experienced police officer present and in command.”\textsuperscript{110} The presence of the USC brought only alarmed responses from Catholics. According to Scarman, it was impossible for the USC to show up in a Catholic area “without heightening tension”.\textsuperscript{111}

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid., 1:16.
\textsuperscript{109} Ibid., 2:5.
\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 3:7.
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid., 3:11.
During the weekend of August 12, the RUC used particularly heavy-handed methods of response to rioting that occurred in the Catholic areas of Belfast. The RUC employed “baton charges…small arms, the use of CS gas”\textsuperscript{112} against what they perceived as an armed uprising. According to multiple eyewitness accounts as well as the Scarman Tribunal, there was simply no rising to put down.\textsuperscript{113} On August 14, the police entered Divis Street of Belfast in a Shorland armored vehicle with mounted Browning machine-guns and opened fire on Catholic civilians, killing four.\textsuperscript{114}

Nelson argues that Catholics were organized in “a desperate defensive action”\textsuperscript{115} against the violent aggression of the SDA and loyalist mobs, of which they were afforded no protection. Moments such as these emphasize the point that the SDLP would later make – that the entire infrastructure of Northern Ireland was fundamentally unstable. Between August 12-14, loyalists invaded Catholic ghettos in Belfast which were contiguous with Protestant neighborhoods, burning the homes of the inhabitants as they passed. During the burnouts, “members of the RUC were present…at the time, but failed to take effective action.”\textsuperscript{116} In all, over 60,000 were burnt out of their homes between July and September in the “biggest forced population movement in Europe since the

\textsuperscript{112} Feeney, 255.

\textsuperscript{113} “Violence and Civil Disturbances in Northern Ireland in 1969,” 2.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid., 1:23.

\textsuperscript{115} Nelson, 91.

Second World War began.”117 83 percent of those forced out of their homes were Catholic.118 This trend would continue in the years to come:

In 1974, a community relations report suggested that 8,180 families were forced to evacuate their houses in the Greater Belfast area between August 1969 and February 1973, 80 percent estimated to be Catholic, and by 1973, 23 out of the 30 Catholic owned bars in North Belfast had been bombed by loyalists.119

Polarization began to take much more visible, pronounced, physical dimensions.

That evening, Jack Lynch, Taoiseach of the Republic released a statement: “It is evident that Stormont is not in control of the situation…The Irish Government can no longer stand by and see innocent people injured and perhaps worse.”120 In response, Lynch authorized the construction of field hospitals in the Republic at points along the border.121 Lynch’s help was not the only assistance to come from the Republic.

The British Government also decided on the 14th that the police of Northern Ireland could no longer control the situation. Prior to the August riots, the Army had a small presence in the North; troops had been sent in after the March bombings which at the time were believed to have been carried out by a resurgent IRA. In July, there were 2,599 British troops, by the end of August this number would surge to 7,081.122 This was

117 Moloney, 68.
119 Ferriter, 627.
120 Hennessey, 164.
121 Ibid., 165.
meant only as a temporary solution. Troops would remain until order was restored and then withdraw.\textsuperscript{123}

Britain also attempted to halt the violence through a series of reform Bills in 1969 and the following years. In October, the Hunt Commission recommended the dissolution of the USC as well as the disarming of the RUC in the aftermath of August’s mayhem.\textsuperscript{124} Harold Wilson, though, defended the continuation of the Special Powers Act, saying they would be reformed as soon as the situation allowed for it. When Chichester-Clarke requested financial assistance to deal with the jobs and housing situation, however, the government was unresponsive.\textsuperscript{125}

The Government instead passed a Community Relations Act (NI), which was designed to provide advisement to various governmental departments regarding harmonious community relations. They also installed a Commissioner for Complaints, who would operate independently of the Northern Ireland Government and would investigate individual grievances. The Macrory Report recommended a new system of local government for Northern Ireland which would consist of 26 local councils. This recommendation was accepted in December 1970.\textsuperscript{126} The following April, the Local Government Boundaries Act (NI) was passed, installing a Boundaries Commissioner to ensure that fair representation of the new local councils would occur.\textsuperscript{127}

\textsuperscript{123} “Joint Communique by the British and Northern Ireland governments, 29 August 1969.”

\textsuperscript{124} “Report of the Advisory Committee on Police of Northern Ireland, Chapter 10.

\textsuperscript{125} Paul Bew and Henry Patterson, \textit{The British State and the Ulster Crisis: From Wilson to Thatcher} (London: Verso, 1985), 20.


\textsuperscript{127} Hennessey, 185-187.
These measures would not have the intended impact that they could have had in mid-1960s; the radical and reactionary elements within Northern Ireland had come to the fore and cosmetic reforms in no way stood a chance of commanding support while people were being burnt out of their homes or killed in the streets. In the ensuing months and years, the withdrawal of troops became an impossibility. Within three years the British military presence would triple in Northern Ireland from its 1969 level.\textsuperscript{128}

During the August riots the IRA was woefully unprepared to play their traditional self-proclaimed role of Catholic defender. Catholics looked to them for defense but found none. According to Feeney, “When the North exploded in August 1969…there were nominally about sixty IRA men in Belfast, though most had never seen action. There were perhaps ten in Derry.”\textsuperscript{129} In the aftermath of the fierce August riots, “IRA – I Ran Away” was graffiti’d on Belfast walls. Ironically, the introduction of British troops to the streets in the North was a most welcomed sight for a beleaguered Catholic community. Given the IRA’s departure from violence in the early 1960s, it is clear to see how this situation developed.

\textbf{Rising from the Ashes}

Many republicans felt that they had let their community down during their time of need. Following the August riots, there became a sudden determination amongst many within the IRA to see that such things did not happen again. Watching Catholics welcome British troops as protectors was a particularly disturbing sight. Whereas many

\textsuperscript{128} White and White, 335.

\textsuperscript{129} Feeney, 249.
traditionalists within the IRA wanted to immediately take on the role of Catholic defender and resume the military conflict with Britain, the leadership of the IRA remained rigidly opposed.

Indeed, the leaders of the IRA were trapped once again within the constraints of political theory which did not accord with reality. “Largely ignoring Northern events, the GHQ moved to a point of no return: a nine-point proposal drawn up by Seán Garland that would permit an end to abstentionism.”130 At the Army Convention in October, the decision was reached, under leader Cathal Goulding, for the IRA to pursue a political rather than military struggle. Seemingly oblivious to the events that were transpiring in the North, Goulding was “totally opposed to the notion of the IRA as a Catholic defence force”.131

Eventually, “the logical endgame of its [IRA] socialist-republican philosophy was the eradication of the Catholic-defender tradition from its doctrine.”132 It seems that Goulding still clung to the notion that cross-community cooperation was possible. As Feeney concluded, the Dublin leaders “were not responding to reality, but a perceived reality seen through the lens of a Marxist template that did not apply to the Irish situation.”133 It was seen that the IRA should get more “directly involved in ‘social’ issues which reflected the needs of the ‘people’.”134 This language is important and noteworthy, though at that time no one could have known it. With the passage of time,

130 Ibid., 145.
131 Ibid., 258.
132 Smith, 85.
133 Feeney, 250.
134 Bew and Patterson, 29.
Gerry Adams would argue for the republican movement to follow this very course of action, employing this very language. Adams would eventually advocate the ending of the abstentionist platform as well.

For the time being though, Northern republicans refused to accept the position of the Dublin-based leadership. Being in the midst of the conflict, they harbored no illusions, but understood the conflict as it was. They saw the Stormont government teetering, ready to collapse. To end abstentionism and provide recognition to the government at such a critical moment seemed not only like capitulation, but a complete betrayal of everything the republican movement stood for. The Northern dissenters were most prominently represented by Sean MacStiofain, Joe Cahill, Seamus Twomey, Jimmy Drumm, and a twenty-year-old Gerry Adams. These men had been drifting away from the Dublin leadership, cutting off communications in September of that year. Regardless of received orders, they went ahead with their defense preparations.

In December, GHQ held a vote on the end of the abstentionist policy in Dublin. A cornerstone of republican ideology, GHQ was recommended lifting the ban on each of the “partitionist” governments: Westminster, Leinster, and Stormont. The recommendation to end abstention was passed by 153 votes to 104, less than the two-thirds required in order to alter the IRA’s constitution. MacStiofain led his followers out of the meeting and reconvened a Provisional meeting in Kevin Barry Hall. The walkout signaled a decisive split in the IRA; the Provisional IRA (PIRA) was born. The old-guard was henceforth known as the Original IRA (OIRA). For Adams “the issue was

135 Ibid., 249.
136 Wallace, 40.
not abstentionism itself but what it had come to represent: a leadership with a wrong set of priorities which had led the IRA into ignominy in August.”

Under the leadership of MacStiofain, who became president of Provisional Sinn Fein as well as a member of the Army Council, the PIRA embarked upon a new strategy to achieve Irish unity. The British forces, which had been sent in to restore order, were viewed as an occupying force - the true enemy. The role of Protestants in the conflict was downplayed. PIRA argued that Britain was the real cause of the sectarian clashes that persisted in Northern Ireland, that they manipulated Protestants. It was also asserted that “when Britain lost the will to war and withdrew, then the formerly loyal would find their historical destiny in a united and new Ireland.”

This conclusion, like many reached by republicans previously, was highly presumptuous and denied many historical facts.

PIRA developed a rudimentary plan toward uniting Ireland. They sought first and foremost to gain support from the Catholic community in the North by assuming the role of their defender. Once secured, the PIRA would set out to topple the Stormont Government. When this was achieved, PIRA would continue their systematic war, and produce a situation where Northern Ireland would become ungovernable as well as an economic liability to Britain. When this objective was attained, the PIRA believed they could force their way to the negotiation table to deal with the British government directly, at which point they would demand a total British withdrawal from the island.

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137 Moloney, The Secret History of the IRA, 72.
138 Wallace, 156.
139 Smith, 96.
Adams would later argue that this strategy was lacking from the very start because it only pursued the struggle through military means. Indeed, when simplified, the IRA’s split can be seen in terms of politics versus militarism. There was no middle ground or compromise of strategy. Adams argued that the traditional republicans who had provoked the split carried with them “a suspicion…of the politicization process.”\textsuperscript{140} In due time, a group of Northern radicals, led by Adams and which included Martin McGuinness and Danny Morrison, would assume control of the republican movement and lead it in a new direction based on a dual strategy of military and political agitation.\textsuperscript{141}

The PIRA began the process of rebuilding by first working behind the barricades that were set up by Catholic defense associations. These areas, in the Lower Falls, Ardoyne, Markets, and Short Strand neighborhoods of Belfast, along with the Bogside and Creggan areas of Londonderry, “were in effect run by republican-dominated street committees” during the summer of 1969. In these early months of the Troubles, defense of the Catholics was the principle role of the PIRA.

Interestingly, the PIRA stepped in to assume this role with the tacit acceptance of British military forces.\textsuperscript{142} Working behind these lines freely, PIRA sought to gain recruits, producing immediate success in Belfast.\textsuperscript{143} As Wallace points out, these ‘no-go’ zones “provided safe and fertile breeding ground for the IRA.” Whereas the Catholic population initially saw the British army as the guarantor of their safety at the outbreak of

\textsuperscript{140} Adams, The Politics of Irish Freedom, 35.
\textsuperscript{141} Smith, 86.
\textsuperscript{142} Feeney, 260.
\textsuperscript{143} Smith, 91.
the Troubles, events would soon alter their opinion considerably, pushing them towards the PIRA.

1970 produced the same type of rioting as the previous year and the “army increasingly resorted to heavy-handed methods to suppress the disturbances. The use of CS riot gas and baton charges became commonplace and all helped to fulfill the predictions of those like MacStiofain as they eroded Catholic support for the army.”\textsuperscript{144}

Once again, marching season proved to be the catalyst for renewed violence. Given the previous year’s outbreak of violence, Catholics were shocked that the Orange parades were given permission by the British army to march down the Springfield road at Easter time. Predictably, riots ensued, in which the British Army sided with the Protestant marchers and responded to Catholic stone throwing with CS gas.\textsuperscript{145}

On June 27\textsuperscript{th}, there were two Orange parades scheduled, one to march past Ardoyne and the other to march through Ballymurphy - both Catholic areas. As the Ardoyne march turned into another riotous occasion, the PIRA engaged in battle with loyalist snipers, killing three. Following the shootout, a loyalist mob set upon the Belfast neighborhood Short Strand, a Catholic island within a Protestant ocean. During the incursion, the British army was noticeably absent. Instead, PIRA gunmen took up defense positions in St. Matthew’s Church to repel the loyalist mob; in the battle that ensued, five Protestants and one Catholic were killed. The PIRA had assumed their role as Catholic protector. In response to the violence of June 27\textsuperscript{th}, “over 500 Catholic

\textsuperscript{144} Ibid., 92.

\textsuperscript{145} Moloney, 85.
workers were expelled from the Harland and Wolff shipyards in east Belfast by Protestants.\textsuperscript{146}

Following these small yet significant successes, the PIRA embarked on an offensive campaign against British forces in October of 1970. “By the end of the year there had been 153 explosions.”\textsuperscript{147} 1971 would see an even greater increase in the level of violence perpetrated by the PIRA. Over the course of the year “there were 1,756 shootings, 1,515 bombing incidents and 174 deaths.”\textsuperscript{148} Throughout the year, the British army was forced to disarm “between 200 and 600 pounds of explosives in every month.”\textsuperscript{149}

These statistics are startling when viewed against the state of the IRA’s aforementioned arms stores following the conclusion of the Border Campaign in 1962. It is worth critical examination to understand how the PIRA had the means to step up its military campaign so dramatically in such a short period of time.

Although support undoubtedly came from the Irish Republic, the greatest source of IRA guns and money was the opening of the American connection in the late 1960s. This support continued in the coming decades. In 1970, Michael Flannery, a member of the North Tipperary Brigade in the 1920s, set up NORAID. NORAID was linked with a Belfast-based organization called the Northern Aid Committee, which was run by

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\textsuperscript{146} Hennessey, 174. Also see Bew and Patterson, 31.
\textsuperscript{147} Smith, 95.
\textsuperscript{148} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{149} Hennessey, 202.
\end{flushleft}
republicans.\textsuperscript{150} Admittedly, set up at the requests of republicans, NORAID reported having sent $3 million to Northern Ireland between 1971 and 1986, although this figure has been contested by experts and is likely to have been much higher. This money, intended as relief, went into the hands of the republican movement and was undoubtedly used to secure arms.\textsuperscript{151}

Aside from NORAID, the IRA had direct links with arms dealers in America as well. George Harrison, a resident of Brooklyn, is identified by Holland as the “IRA’s principal source of arms for almost thirty years. Most of the weapons from America reaching the hands of the IRA first passed through his.”\textsuperscript{152} Though small in number – the network involved in Harrison’s gun-running ring never expanded past twelve – the Harrison connection proved an invaluable resource for the IRA until his arrest in 1981.\textsuperscript{153}

Harrison provided the IRA with a variety of weapons throughout his career as a gun-runner. After 1973, it is estimated that he “supplied the IRA with between two and three hundred weapons a year.”\textsuperscript{154} To give an idea of what the incoming shipments were like at the height of the Troubles, “a confidential British army document shows that” in one calendar year, March 1975 to March 1976 “the IRA acquired 234 rifles, 335


\textsuperscript{152} Holland, 64.

\textsuperscript{153} \textit{Ibid.}, 99.

\textsuperscript{154} \textit{Ibid.}, 83.
handguns, and 27 machine guns”.\textsuperscript{155} Harrison estimates that he spent approximately $1.1 million on weapons for the IRA in America between the 1950s and 1981.\textsuperscript{156}

**The Fall of Stormont**

On August 21, 1970 the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) was established. It would be another year before a constitution and executive would be completed, but the SDLP drew largely from the stated aims of the NDP, which had dissolved itself at the formation of the SDLP.\textsuperscript{157} The party was led by Ivan Cooper, Austin Currie, Paddy Devlin, Gerry Fitt, John Hume and Paddy O’Hanlon. Of the initial 300-400 members of the SDLP, it is estimated that “not less than eighty percent would have been current NDP members or else would have been part of the NDP membership over the course of the previous five years.”\textsuperscript{158}

The party’s first policy document, *Towards a New Ireland*, introduced in September of 1972, called for a British declaration in favor of unity. It was offered that Britain and Ireland should assume joint authority to begin to allow for a smooth transition towards unity. This process would be facilitated through the creation of a National Senate, an interim arrangement designed to create an environment where the parliaments of Dublin and Belfast would have equal representation.\textsuperscript{159} Of course, above all else, the

\textsuperscript{155} *Ibid.*, 86.

\textsuperscript{156} *Ibid.*

\textsuperscript{157} Murray and Tonge, 11-12.

\textsuperscript{158} *Ibid.*, 12.

\textsuperscript{159} “Towards a New Ireland,” Section entitled An Examination.
SDLP argued for unity only through consent. For the time being however, their talk was ineffectual, as any semblance of normality politics was shelved.

Conversely, the leaders of unionism focused on security as their central concern in the early 1970s.

The Explosives Act (NI), 1970, tightened controls on the use of explosives, and increased penalties for offences. The Firearm (Amendment) Act (NI), 1971, had similar objectives. The Prevention of Incitement to Hatred Act (NI), 1970, and the Criminal Justice (Temporary Provisions) Act (NI), 1970, were both rushed through Parliament before the summer recess.\(^{160}\)

In March, Stormont procured an extra 2,500 British troops, bringing the total to just below 10,000.\(^{161}\) Amidst great pressure to put down the IRA uprising, Brian Faulkner announced to Stormont on May 25:

> Any soldier seeing any person with a weapon or seeing any person acting suspiciously may fire either to warn or may fire with effect, depending on the circumstances and without waiting for orders from anyone. \(^{162}\)

The SDLP responded to these measures by threatening to withdraw from government.

Following a string of bombings in July of 1971, the decision was reached by the British army to impose a curfew on the Lower Falls area of Belfast. This move was ill advised for a number of reasons. To begin with, the Lower Falls area was predominately controlled by the OIRA “who had been following a policy of non-confrontation with the army.”\(^{163}\) The British army uncovered a significant stash of weapons during the curfew,

\(^{160}\) Wallace, 42.

\(^{161}\) Ibid.

\(^{162}\) McAllister, 91.

\(^{163}\) Smith, 92.
including 250 pounds of explosives and 21,000 rounds of ammunition, but also incurred an unnecessary battle with the dormant OIRA, in which five civilians were killed and 60 were injured.\(^\text{164}\)

The move was also perceived by the Catholic community as an attack solely against their community, thus pitting them against the British troops, who were increasingly being seen as “the armed wing of the Stormont regime.”\(^\text{165}\) While flying overhead in a helicopter, the Army announced, “All civilians in this locality are to get into their houses and stay there. After the military occupy the area anyone found on the street will be arrested.”\(^\text{166}\) Throughout the raids that occurred while the area was on lockdown, the British army proceeded to damage a great deal of property; there were also widespread accusations from the Catholic population of looting and abuse by British soldiers. The curfew, which last 36 hours, was finally broken by over 1,000 women, “who marched from Andersontown with milk and bread to feed the besieged inhabitants.”\(^\text{167}\)

Three civilians were killed by the Army during confrontations amidst the curfew. Among the victims were Derry natives Seamus Cusack and Desmond Beattie, both shot by British troops in controversial instances where the Army claimed the Catholics were armed, yet bystanders to the deaths all claimed this to be a fabrication.\(^\text{168}\) Aside from the alienation that these incidents caused amongst the Catholic population, they also

\(^{164}\) Hennessey, 174-5.
\(^{165}\) Nelson, 101.
\(^{166}\) Wallace, 41.
\(^{167}\) Moloney, 91.
\(^{168}\) McAllister, 92.
prompted a walk-out of Stormont from the SDLP. In the aftermath of these incidents Hume remarked, “There is no role we can usefully play within the present system.” Edward Heath, Prime Minister of Great Britain would later state that the SDLP walkout had “deprived Stormont of any remaining legitimacy.” In less than a year Heath would prorogue Stormont parliament indefinitely.

The following month produced an even bigger uproar from the Catholic community, as Brian Faulkner, the new Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, introduced internment without trial upon those believed to be connected with the IRA. The consequences of internment would be far-reaching. On August 9, British troops invaded Catholic homes, arresting 342. They relied upon faulty, outdated intelligence and were forced to release 15 people within two days. Most PIRA men were tipped off about the imminent arrests and subsequently escaped. “The major victims of internment were civil rights agitators, not current IRA activists.”

The biggest victor to emerge from the internment experiment was in fact the PIRA. They had largely escaped arrest, won a huge propaganda victory and been helped by the way in which internment “emphasized the political nature of the conflict whereas normal legal procedures would allow the government to present the violence as criminal in origin.”

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169 Ibid., 93.

170 David McKittrick and David McVea, Making Sense of the Troubles (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2000), 7.

171 Hennessey, 194.


173 Ibid.
campaign “from selected bombings to a widespread bombing campaign”\textsuperscript{174} thus producing a large increase in casualties in the months that followed. “The four months after the introduction of internment saw the deaths of thirty soldiers, eleven RUC officers and seventy-three civilians.”\textsuperscript{175} Internment was undoubtedly the catalyst for the introduction of direct rule that was to occur the following year.

The situation in Northern Ireland deteriorated at an unprecedented rate following its introduction. “In 1971 there had been prior to internment, thirty four deaths in the North; between internment and the end of the year there were 139.”\textsuperscript{176} Internment served only to “alienate the whole of the Catholic community from the Stormont administration.”\textsuperscript{177} It led to widespread rioting and further community polarization, as 7,000 people, mostly Catholics, were burned out of their homes within only three days of the start of internment. Of course, harsh measures are often met with equally severe responses. By the end of the year violence in Northern Ireland had reached such a level as to prompt British Home Secretary Reginald Maudling to state that the government was merely hoping “to reduce the violence to an acceptable level.”\textsuperscript{178}

The SDLP immediately called upon all Catholics to withdraw from any public office they held. On August 22, 1971, “130 councillors from 20 councils unanimously

\textsuperscript{174} Hennessey, 195.

\textsuperscript{175} Smith, 101.

\textsuperscript{176} Bew and Patterson, 39.


\textsuperscript{178} Galliher and DeGregory, 65-6.
agreed to withdraw immediately from their elected positions.”179 Following the events in Londonderry the following January, a level of almost total cooperation would be achieved. The party also called on the Catholic community to withhold all rent and rates from the Stormont government. McAllister attributes this move as demonstrating the “virtual secession of many Catholics from the state.”180 The SDLP subsequently distanced itself from Stormont even further following the introduction of internment, refusing to talk with the British until internment was lifted.

The position of Stormont was also greatly hurt by internment. As Catholics withdrew from public office, Stormont’s legitimacy was almost impossible to uphold. The fall of Stormont was exactly the victory that the PIRA had been hoping to achieve. The final push that would crumble the Stormont regime came, ironically, not from a military assault but from a civil rights march in Derry on January 30, 1972.

The British Government had been coming to the conclusion that Stormont was no viable means to deal with Northern Ireland’s problems. “Bloody Sunday” forced the Government to finally act upon this position. The scheduled civil rights march in Derry on January 30th was banned but nevertheless attended by nearly 10,000 people. During the march - which was fighting against, among other things, the introduction of internment without trial - civil rights marchers confronted a British Paratroop Regiment and began throwing stones. The troops responded by opening fire on the crowd, killing thirteen.181

179 Hennessey, 194.
180 McAllister, 101.
181 Ibid., 206.
Despite claims that members of the PIRA were present during the march, there is no evidence that any marchers had carried guns or fired any shots. This claim is corroborated by over 700 eyewitness accounts from marchers and bystanders. After Reginald Maudling claimed that the marchers were armed, Bernadette Devlin, one of the leaders of the march, vehemently denied the claim. While speaking in front of the House of Commons, Devlin seethed, “The minister got up and lied to the house. Nobody shot at the paratroopers, but someone will shortly…” at which point she ran across the floor of the Commons and scratched and mauled at Maudling’s face.

Bloody Sunday was a turning point for the Troubles on a number of fronts. Any remnant of the civil rights movement effectively ended on that day as it lost any semblance of the unity it once had. Derry, the hot-bed of discontent for years, was once again the scene for which atrocities would plague the Catholic community. Father Cahal Daly summed up the tide of emotion in Derry following Bloody Sunday.

A lot of younger people in Derry who may have been more pacifist became quite militant as a result of it. People who were there on that day and who saw what happened were absolutely enraged by it and just wanted to seek some kind of revenge for it.

Among those deeply affected by the events of Bloody Sunday, was 22-year old Martin McGuinness, who attributed his radicalization by the events that transpired in Derry in the summer of 1971 through January 1972. McGuinness claims to have been

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182 Ferriter, 627.
183 Ibid.
184 Power, 228.
185 McKittrick and McVea, 4.
pushed towards the IRA due to atrocities committed by the British. “The British
developed republicanism. It was nothing we had done to develop resistance to British
rule. They brought about resistance to British rule.”  

McGuinness would later become the Commander of the IRA for all of Northern Ireland.

The PIRA achieved a monumental propaganda victory for their cause as well as
an immediate upsurge in enrollment. In the Republic, outrage ruled the day. A national
day of mourning was called. In Dublin, a mob of more than 20,000 burned down the
British embassy. Many within the Dublin government began calling for British
withdrawal.

Most importantly, Bloody Sunday broke the back of the Stormont Government.
On March 24, Britain prorogued the Stormont Government for one year, assuming direct
Whitelaw assumed the position as the first Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. With
the imposition of direct rule, the British Government also began to immediately look for a
solution that would marginalize the republican forces in Northern Ireland while at the
same time prove acceptable to both moderate unionists and nationalists. For Heath, “only
direct rule could offer us the breathing-space necessary for building it [power-sharing
government].”

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186 Moloney, 362.
187 Hennessey, 206.
188 McKittrick and McVea, 6.
PART III: THE ORANGE CARD

**The Sunningdale Experiment; The Unionist Veto**

Obviously internment proved to be an unacceptable alternative to republican violence, as it had only led to increased levels of violence and anger from all elements of the Catholic population. By March, 913 people were being held by British forces without trial.\(^{189}\) Nonetheless violence occurred at a staggering level throughout 1972, by far the worst year of the Troubles. Nearly 500 people were killed during the year.

There were almost 2,000 explosions and over 10,000 shooting incidents, an average of around 30 shootings per day. Almost 5,000 people were injured. Almost 2,000 armed robberies netted £800,000 most of it going into paramilitary coffers.\(^{190}\)

The British Government recognized that changes had to be made in security policy with due haste.

One of Whitelaw’s first undertakings as Secretary of State was to first bring the PIRA to the negotiating table to find out what their bargaining position would be. To help bring the PIRA to the bargaining table, Whitelaw agreed to concede political status to republican prisoners, the consequences of which would be far-reaching. The Provisionals, riding high on the fall of Stormont, also sought a meeting. Following an announcement of a ceasefire on June 26, Whitelaw agreed to meet secretly with leaders of the PIRA in London on July 7. The Provisionals sent a delegation of Sean

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\(^{189}\) White and White, 336.

\(^{190}\) McKittrick and McVea, 7.
MacStiofain, Daithi O Conaill, Seamus Twomey, Ivor Bell, Martin McGuinness, Myles Shevlin, and Gerry Adams, whom Whitelaw had released from prison, to attend.191

As Smith explains, this delegation went to London with “little comprehension of political bargaining.”192 The Provisionals gave the British an ultimatum, allowing them until the first day of 1975 to withdraw. Should the British want to conclude a secret agreement, they were willing to extend their deadline by one year. The Provisionals demands in no way corresponded to their position of power. What they demanded could only have been delivered with a superior army that could produce total victory.

Furthermore, the PIRA delegates expected the British to just brush aside the constitutional obligations that they were bound to under the Ireland Act of 1949. The Act guaranteed the position of Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom as long as it maintained the consent of a majority in the province.193 Whitelaw called the PIRA ultimatum ‘absurd.’194

The negotiations ended with no progress between the two sides. As Smith shows, because the republican movement operated with ideologically motivated goals driven solely by military campaign, it was unable to make political advances following military victories. The PIRA had worked their way to the negotiating table but were paralyzed by their own inflexibility. Thus for republicans, 1972, the self-proclaimed ‘Year of Victory’,

191 Smith, 105.
192 Ibid., 106.
193 Ibid.
194 Hennessey, 211.
ended with an inability to capitalize on the advances that the movement had otherwise secured.

The British Government also undertook a decidedly new approach to security in the North. Following the violence of July 21, a day which became known as ‘Bloody Friday’ – in which the PIRA set off twenty-two bombs in Belfast within the span of an hour, killing nine - the British responded swiftly and strongly. They immediately retaliated with Operation Motorman, bringing British troop entry into the Catholic areas ‘no-go’ areas, effectively eliminating the crucial safe havens of the PIRA. Bloody Friday, argues Smith, showed how “simply upping the ante” towards a ‘total war’, proved to be entirely “counter-productive”.195 Because of its inferior military capabilities, PIRA could only maintain violence at low-levels.

In November, the Detention of Terrorists (NI) Order was introduced and was subsequently approved by Parliament. This proved to be a new alternative to interning republicans but in practice, changed little. Instead of indefinitely holding republicans, a suspect’s case now had to be referred to a commissioner by the Chief Constable. However, once the referral was made, there was no set time with which the case had to be heard.196

In December the British Government also published the Diplock Report, produced with the overall aim of making acts of violence in Northern Ireland appear ‘normal’ rather than ‘political’. Diplock established trials by a single judge instead of the traditional trial by jury for terrorist offenses. Justification was given for this measure

195 Smith, 112.
196 Cunningham, 20-1.
because of the intimidation and subsequent “perverse acquittals” that were becoming commonplace in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{197} Furthermore, Diplock sought to have the army play a secondary role to the police, once again for the purpose of making Northern Ireland appear as an internalized problem. Diplock’s proposals were incorporated within the Northern Ireland (Emergency Provisions) Act (EPA), becoming law in July of 1973. \textsuperscript{198}

Whilst in the process of neutralizing the PIRA, the British Government also sought to secure a constitutional arrangement for Northern Ireland based on a power-sharing government in which both Protestants and Catholics would have a stake in the political process. In October of 1972, the Northern Ireland Office published a White Paper, “The Future of Northern Ireland”, which set forth a plan where ‘real participation should be achieved by giving minority interests a share in the exercise of executive power.’\textsuperscript{199} “These proposals” led to negotiations that eventually “evolved into a March 1973 White Paper and then the Northern Ireland Constitution Act (1973).”\textsuperscript{200}

A key component to the British plan was the inclusion of the Republic in decision making. Paragraph 78 of the White Paper recommended ‘that any new arrangements for Northern Ireland should, whilst meeting the wishes of Northern Ireland and Great Britain, be, so far as possible, acceptable to and accepted by the Republic of Ireland.’\textsuperscript{201} This was

\textsuperscript{197} Hennessey, 212.

\textsuperscript{198} Cunningham, 22.

\textsuperscript{199} Ibid., 13.


\textsuperscript{201} Murray and Tonge, 53.
the first informal recognition by the British Government that the Republic had a legitimate role to play in Northern Ireland, one that could no longer be ignored.

From December 6-9, British and Irish delegates, along with the SDLP, met at Sunningdale in England and set forth their respective positions on Northern Ireland. It was decided that there would be a Council of Ireland, which would be ‘confined to representatives of the two parts of Ireland, with appropriate safeguards for the British Government’s financial and other interests.’\textsuperscript{202} Initially delegated a very weak role in the proposed arrangement, the Irish dimension was considered essential to the nationalist community.

The SDLP was the main proponent for a strong Council of Ireland. “It was precisely because the NIO was attempting, without any serious changes in security and internment policies, to integrate the SDLP that its intransigence on the Council of Ireland became the focus of negotiations.”\textsuperscript{203} In the end, the Council was granted ‘executive and harmonizing functions’.\textsuperscript{204} The Council could act only by unanimous decision and would be used primarily for the function of integrating domestic policies, for example in transportation and tourism. It was also agreed that the Republic would assist in extraditing suspected murderers back to Northern Ireland for prosecution, an important security measure.\textsuperscript{205}

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\textsuperscript{202} The Sunningdale Agreement,” 7.
\textsuperscript{203} Bew and Patterson, 58.
\textsuperscript{204} McKittrick and McVea, 16.
\textsuperscript{205} The Sunningdale Agreement., 10.
\end{flushright}
For nationalists, the Council was Britain’s formal recognition of the reality of the situation in Northern Ireland. Granting Ireland an executive role in Northern Ireland was seen by the SDLP to be correcting the wrong of the 1920 Agreement. In return for their new role in the North, the Republic gave a de facto recognition of present realities. The Republic declared that they “fully accepted and solemnly declared that there could be no change in the status of Northern Ireland until a majority of the people of Northern Ireland desired a change in their status.”\textsuperscript{206} The Republic did not however, alter Articles two and three of their constitution, which set forth their irredentist claims on the six counties of Ulster.

For unionists, the Irish dimension would prove to be the sticking point. For loyalists, the inclusion of Ireland in any solution was an unlawful, illegitimate usurpation of sovereignty in a foreign land. For Faulknerite unionists, who supported the Sunningdale Agreement, the Council of Ireland was a concession which afforded no actual power to Dublin. In return for much-needed help in cross-border security cooperation, Dublin was granted a role that, as Faulkner put it, ‘meant nothing’ because any proposal set for by the Council had to be approved by the Executive and the Assembly, thus allowing an effective veto on all of the Council’s decisions.\textsuperscript{207}

The Assembly elections of 1973 set the stage for a new Assembly to take power in Northern Ireland. Elected on the basis of proportional representation, the SDLP won 22.1 percent of the total vote, winning 19 of the 78 seats available, thus securing itself as the unrivaled voice of nationalism in Northern Ireland. The Sunningdale Agreement

\textsuperscript{206} McKittrick and McVea, 17.

\textsuperscript{207} Ibid., 17
embodied the two corner-stone principles of SDLP thinking, namely a power-sharing government and an Irish dimension. For the time being, it was a huge victory for the party.

The unionist side was rife with division. Faulknerites won 23 seats, and together with the other pro-White Paper groups, held a majority of 24 over those opposed to the agreement. During the remainder of 1973 the realignments within the official Unionist Party and the shift of opinion within the Protestant community slowly eroded this majority.

Hard-line Unionists were the main opponents to the British initiative during this period. Many felt as if the rug was being pulled out from underneath them with the Sunningdale agreement. Unionists believed that they were being sold out by the British Government. By allowing republicans into the decision making process, it was perceived that the British Government was preparing for the eventual hand over of power to the Irish Government. On January 4 1974, the Official Unionist Party passed a motion, 457 to 374, rejecting Sunningdale, and thereby forcing Faulkner’s resignation from the party, which occurred three days later.208

In February, a general election was called. It would prove disastrous for Faulkner. The United Ulster Unionist Council (UUUC) was formed in December, bringing the various strands of loyalism together with one common aim, opposition to power-sharing. In February, members of William Craig’s Ulster Vanguard Party, Ian Paisley’s Democratic Unionist Party, and those in the Unionist Party opposed to the White Paper

208 Dutter, 624.
ran under the banner of the UUUC. In the general election that month, UUUC candidates won eleven of the twelve Westminster seats afforded to Northern Ireland with 50.8 percent of the votes.209

The British Government, determined to push a devolved assembly ahead, voted against renegotiating the Sunningdale agreement. Given a new mandate from that the general election, the Ulster Workers Council (UWC), a makeup of power-wielding industrial workers, along with various Protestant paramilitary organizations set forth their position. “The decision of the electorate of Northern Ireland at the polls on 28 February 1974 rejecting the Sunningdale agreement and the imposed constitutional settlement, requires re-negotiation of the constitutional arrangements and calls accordingly for such re-negotiation.”210 Barring such action, the UWC promised to bring Northern Ireland to a halt.

The UWC announced they would strike following the decision of the Assembly, by 44 to 28 votes, that they would not renegotiate the Sunningdale Agreement. Throughout the month of April Protestant paramilitary organizations, namely the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) and Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), worked in conjunction with one another to help arrange the necessary framework for an effective strike.211

The strike began on May 15 initially to poor support. Indisputably, the kick-start to the strike was the use of intimidation tactics employed by the UDA. The workers at Harland & Wolff ship factory were warned that if they stayed at work their cars would be

209 Bew and Patterson, 65.


burnt in the lot. These bully tactics were employed throughout Northern Ireland.

Anderson explains how the strike achieved its initial success.

In microcosm, that [Harland & Wolff examples] was the story of the first few days, a story of massive intimidation. The most effective shutdown was in the port of Larne, a ferry terminal about twenty-three miles from Belfast. Larne was very largely Protestant and from the beginning was controlled by Protestant paramilitaries. Nearly every business in the town closed on the first day; men in combat jackets carrying clubs ensured that shops shut; the harbour area was sealed off with a barricade of two cars and a container lorry.212

While the paramilitaries forced people off the job, the UWC successfully cut Northern Ireland’s power supply to 60 percent on the first day of the strike.213

As McAllister points out, the strike was not successful solely because of paramilitary intimidation, but rather received a great deal of tacit support from Protestants who held ‘genuine uncertainties’ regarding the new constitutional arrangement.214 The British government did not send in the troops to break up the strike, drawing harsh criticism from the SDLP along the way. “The army command in the north had no intention of using troops against the strikers to defend a regime which they were convinced would collapse anyway because of its acute internal divisions.”215

On May 25, however, Harold Wilson did release a statement condemning the strike and those who supported it. Wilson’s language was striking.

The people on this side of the water – British parents – have seen their sons vilified and spat upon and murdered. British taxpayers have seen the

212 Ibid., 10.
213 Ibid.
214 McAllister, 143.
215 Bew and Patterson, 67.
taxes they have poured out, almost without regard to cost – over £300 million a year this year with the cost of the Army operation on top of that – going into NI. They see property destroyed by evil violence and are asked to pick up the bill for rebuilding it. Yet people who benefit from all this now viciously defy Westminster, purporting to act as though they were an elected government; people who spend their lives sponging on Westminster and British democracy and then systematically assault democratic methods. Who do these people think they are?\textsuperscript{216}

Much of the passive support that existed for the strike prior to May 25 turned to outright support following these remarks.

After an SDLP ultimatum on May 25, which threatened withdrawal from the Assembly en bloc unless troops were used to regain control of the state, the troops finally moved in to retake petrol stations. At this, the UWC announced they would cut off the remaining supply of all power and services, which was being kept at a level to allow for the essential services to still function - the consequences of which would be devastating.\textsuperscript{217}

On May 28, Faulkner was approached by his backbenchers and informed that he could no longer expect their support for the Assembly. They recommended negotiating with the UWC. When the Assembly refused this motion, Faulkner and his supporters resigned from the Assembly. As the Assembly no longer commanded the support of any unionists save those in the Alliance Party, the Sunningdale experiment was dead and buried. Unionists had shown that the Orange Card, the veto, was as effective as ever.

\textsuperscript{216} UWC Strike – Text of Broadcast made by Harold Wilson, 25 May 1974.

\textsuperscript{217} McAllister, 144.
Unionist Intransigence: Return to Direct Rule

With Sunningdale’s collapse a new White Paper was presented in July of 1974. The paper, entitled The Northern Ireland Constitution, sought a constitutional convention “to consider what provisions for the government of Northern Ireland would be likely to command the most widespread acceptance throughout the community.”\(^\text{218}\) In effect, the outcome of this exercise was concluded before a vote was ever cast. When the SDLP’s attempts to make power-sharing and the Irish dimension non-negotiable fell on deaf ears, the constitutional convention lost any hope of producing a successful outcome.

The UUUC retained its cohesiveness from the previous year and in the Convention elections of 1975 won 47 of the 78 seats on a platform - directly opposed to the SDLP’s platform - of opposition to mandatory power-sharing and an institutionalized Irish Dimension.”\(^\text{219}\) Under the terms of the Northern Ireland Act of 1974, a majority could “submit a draft report…with a rejection of guaranteed ministerial positions for members of any but the majority part in the assembly.”\(^\text{220}\) The UUUC dominated Convention elections, winning 46 of the 78 seats.

The recommendations of the Convention were predictably unacceptable to the SDLP, as the UUUC sought a return to the traditional Stormont system of majority rule. As Nelson points out, “It was as if seven years’ events had not occurred, as if the status quo could be restored without concession to opponents’ grievances – the plans for

\(^{218}\) Ibid., 148.
\(^{219}\) Ibid., 144.
\(^{220}\) Cunningham, 18.
opposition involvement in backbench committees apart.”221 Kelley argues along the same lines, that the “Protestant community had, if anything, grown more intransigent over the past year and more convinced of its right to unfettered rule.”222 After the UUUC voted 37 to 1 rejecting any possibility of power-sharing, the SDLP walked out of the Convention, effectively killing it. Britain was back to the drawing board. The Convention was formally dissolved March 5, 1976.

It can be argued that the Convention was just the British government’s way of producing a smoother transition back to direct rule. The government could point to their attempt to allow for the people of the North to hash things out on their own, point to the failure of the people of the North to do so, and could thereby claim with reasonable justification, the impracticality of beginning any new initiatives on the political front. Rees wrote the epitaph of the Convention fittingly:

There is now no prospect of agreement between the parties there…it is clearly not possible at this time to make progress towards a devolved system of government for Northern Ireland…the government…does not contemplate any major initiative for some time to come.223

221 Nelson, 166.
222 Kelley, 13.
223 McAllister, 159.
PART IV: THE CHANGING DYNAMICS OF CONFLICT

The SDLP Re-Think

Following the breakdown of the power-sharing Assembly and the subsequent collapse of the Constitutional Convention, the SDLP underwent a fundamental re-think as to how they could create a working solution to Northern Ireland’s problems. The SDLP was faced with problems on all sides, not least of which was overcoming the unionist veto. Given the nature of Northern Ireland, a state bitterly divided by two fundamentally opposed traditions, the SDLP’s principles of a power-sharing government and institutionalized link with the nation that one-third of the nation pledged its allegiance, is an understandable position.

However, unionists effectively said that there was no problem in need of correction through their advocacy of a return to majority rule governance. For the SDLP, elimination of the unionist veto was an absolute necessity. As John Hume concluded following the collapse of the Convention, his party was left with two choices, to “keep trying something you know is going to fail or you move on to a wider stage – the Anglo-Irish approach.”224

Thus began what many have referred to the ‘greening’ of the SDLP. The SDLP became convinced that an internal solution was impossible so long as unionists were allowed to halt any nationalist progress; therefore, the party sought closer ties with

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224 Hennessey, 265.
Dublin in the years to come to pressure the British into creating a solution “above the head” of Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{225}

The SDLP policy paper \textit{Facing Reality} was published in 1977. The document outlined the changes the party was going through. Emphasis was placed on the all-Ireland framework for a solution. This was done by first stressing the importance - particularly to the British government - of the concept of identity in Northern Ireland. It was asserted that each tradition should be afforded the right and legitimacy to pursue their respective aspirations and allegiances. Although this had the effect of painting the party as becoming more nationalistic, it more accurately reflected of the reality of the situation in the North.\textsuperscript{226}

The year 1979 would mark a pivotal turn in the direction of the SDLP. With the release of the policy document \textit{Towards a New Ireland}, the SDLP laid down the groundwork of which would become the basis of the Anglo-Irish Agreement six years later. The document called for the formation of a forum from all strands of Irish constitutional nationalism to meet and spell out exactly what Irish unity meant to the nationalists of the North and from the Republic. The SDLP called on Dublin to take a much more active role in searching for a political settlement.\textsuperscript{227}

That year also marked the publication of a new White Paper from Britain under new Home Secretary Humphrey Atkins. Atkins’ proposal set forth the claim that continued direct rule was not ‘satisfactory’ to the British government.

\textsuperscript{225} Murray and Tonge, 65.
\textsuperscript{226} Murray and Tonge, 59.
\textsuperscript{227} Ibid., 97.
and a return of devolved powers was the preferred solution. The paper explicitly rejected any possibility for an Irish dimension to be included in any future settlement.

The SDLP was split in their reaction to the paper. Gerry Fitt welcomed the document before the party had decided finally upon its merits, so as to continue dialogue with unionists; John Hume subsequently dismissed the proposal as unworkable. With that, Fitt, the leader of the party since its inception, resigned from the SDLP, leaving Hume as its leader. In his newfound role, Hume was determined to push the new view of the SDLP forward. He embarked on a series of trips in 1979 to push his party’s agenda forward and to bear pressure upon Dublin and London towards creating a solution that was fair to nationalists.

Among his destinations, Hume traveled to the United States to further advances he had made previously in America. Hume’s first contact with American politics came in November 1972 meeting with Senator Edward Kennedy. Following Bloody Sunday, Kennedy had called for a British withdrawal from Northern Ireland. Hume contacted Kennedy in 1972 and explained the situation as he saw it - if British troops unilaterally left the island, more violence would surely follow. “The main impact of Hume in America was his ability to moderate Irish-American ideas of romantic nationalism based on anti-Britishness, so that the politics of non-violent nationalism could be understood.”

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228 Ibid., 89.
Henceforth, Kennedy sought and followed the advice that Hume gave as developments unfolded in Northern Ireland. Kennedy also introduced Hume to senior Irish-American politicians Tip O’Neill, Speaker of the House, Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan and Governor Hugh Carey of New York. This powerful group later became known as the ‘Four Horsemen.’ The Horsemen, through the influence of Hume, were instrumental in halting the fund-raising operations of NORAID in America in the late 1970s, denouncing the organizations that supplied arms to terrorists time and again. In 1981, NORAID was ruled to be ‘an agent of the IRA’.  

Through the Horsemen, Hume was able to influence American policy all the way to the top of government. As Paul Arthur argues, Hume’s “message was carried by the Horsemen all the way to the White House and his imprint can be found on every major statement of American policy on Ireland from the late 1970s onwards.” In 1979 President Jimmy Carter released a statement “which condemned violence, expressed support for a peaceful settlement involving the Irish government and promised American help with investment in the event of such a settlement.” The offer of economic assistance was a suggestion that had come directly from Hume. Carter further raised the issue of Northern Ireland when he met Margaret Thatcher, Prime Minister of Britain, at an energy summit.

\[229\] Guelke, 529.

\[230\] Paul Arthur, Special Relationships: Britain, Ireland and the Northern Ireland Problem (Belfast: Blackstaff, 2000), 139.

\[231\] Guelke, 529.

\[232\] Murray and Tonge, 87.
in Tokyo that same year. In the years and decades to come, America took an ever-increasing role in promoting and pressing for a political solution in the North. American involvement can be traced back directly to Hume.

The American influence upon the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement was of great importance. For the time being however, Dublin seemed reluctant to become involved in the affairs of the North at the level that Hume demanded. In two years’ time such an opportunity would present itself and the SDLP’s search for a solution at the Anglo-Irish level would finally be realized. What was needed was a catalyst to bring Dublin on board.

The Provisional Reappraisal

Following the failed constitutional experiments of 1974 and 1975, the British Government embarked on a policy shift in order to hold Northern Ireland at arm’s length. They pursued this course with a two pronged strategy. Their primary aim was towards enacting stronger security measures. The PIRA’s violence was a problem not just in Ulster but bombings were at that time beginning to appear in London with greater frequency. They therefore sought to limit the conflict to the province alone by decreasing their military presence in Northern Ireland and instead handing over the brunt of the security responsibility to the RUC and UDR. This strategy was known as ‘Ulsterisation’. This would help “to reinforce the picture of an internalized conflict: to put it coarsely, a picture of locals killing locals”.

By the end of 1976, Britain reduced its military

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233 Arthur, 141.

234 Smith, 143.
strength in Northern Ireland by 6,000 from its 1972 level, while the RUC strength was increased significantly.\footnote{Hennessey, 213.}

The second strand in the British strategy was an attempt to portray the PIRA as a criminal organization. This strategy was called, appropriately enough, ‘Criminalisation’. This policy came as a result of the Gardiner Committee recommendations, which most importantly included a call to end to put an end to internment and also to the political status enjoyed by IRA prisoners since 1972. Political status was seen as a facilitator for paramilitary organizations by lending credence to their claim of legitimacy. Beginning March 1, 1976, anyone convicted of a politically motivated crime would no longer enjoy political status.\footnote{Cunningham, 24.}

The policy of Criminalization was meant to discredit the PIRA. Just as the 1972 cease-fire had yielded no fruitful results because the republican movement lacked the ability for incremental gain that politics could have provided, a truce called during 1975 similarly stalled the republican movement. While there was no fighting to be done, the movement sputtered and the PIRA did much to discredit itself.

While under cease-fire, the PIRA engaged in senseless, oftentimes horrific, tit-for-tat sectarian murders in which they randomly targeted and murdered Protestant civilians. Loyalist paramilitary groups, namely the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) and Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), carried out the same type of attacks on Catholics. Overall, loyalists in fact carried out the majority of these crimes. In some instances, like with the
case of the Shankill butchers,237 stunning atrocities occurred. The arbitrary and appalling nature of many of the crimes which took place marked this period as an especially dark time of the Troubles. In 1974, prominent PIRA man Brendan Hughes was found in possession of a document that revealed the PIRA’s “intentions to foment huge civil disorder through indiscriminate violence.”238

In many cases, rogue elements within the PIRA would react to loyalist slayings without official sanction from PIRA leadership, committing murders under different names. Sectarian murders were claimed by groups like the South Armagh Republican Action Force (SARAF) or the Red Flag Avengers.239 The worst atrocity committed under SARAF occurred in January 1976:

Provisional IRA gunmen halted a minibus carrying textile workers home from work near Kingsmills in South Armagh. They singled out the lone Catholic on board, told him to get out of the way, and then lined up ten Protestants up against the side of the bus and riddled them with automatic fire.240

The truce period was remarkably the worst period of sectarian violence in the history of the Troubles, with 196 civilians being killed in the first nine months of 1975.241 For the year, a total 216 civilians were murdered.242

237 Kelley, 7. As Kelley explains, The Shankill butchers were a loyalist gang of psychopaths who kidnapped Catholic civilians and tortured them with meat cleavers and axes before murdering them. Eight members of their gang were given a total of 42 life sentences for their grisly crimes. Their leader Lennie Murphy was implicated in up to 18 murders.

238 Smith, 119

239 Ibid., 120.

240 Moloney, 320.

241 Kelley, 6.

242 Smith., 131.
Indeed, the PIRA was not only discredited for its sectarian murder campaign during the mid-1970s. The walls actually seemed to be caving in on all sides. Late in 1975, the PIRA and OIRA engaged in a duel on the streets of Belfast. On one occasion, the PIRA went to a house where they believed an OIRA man to be. When told that the man was not in, PIRA men busted down the door and shot and killed a six-year old girl.\textsuperscript{243} The following August, while PIRA men were chased by the British army, they ran their car “over a mother and her three children after the IRA driver was shot dead, killing the three children.”\textsuperscript{244} Incidents like these only served to damage the credibility of the republican movement in the eyes of the community from which they sought their support. After this tragedy, the aunt of the three children started an organization, Peace People, which led marches where tens of thousands of people participated in an effort to bring an end to the interminable violence.\textsuperscript{245}

During the truce, the British also launched a highly effective massive counter-intelligence campaign with strong results. In only the “first five months of 1975, over 400 people were charged with violent offences.”\textsuperscript{246} The British successfully infiltrated the ranks of the PIRA and arrested some of its older leaders during this time, thus opening up the way for rapid advancement for the younger leaders to step in. The impact from these upstarts would be immediate.\textsuperscript{247}

\textsuperscript{243} Kelley, 9.

\textsuperscript{244} Feeney, 280.

\textsuperscript{245} \textit{Ibid}.

\textsuperscript{246} Smith, 133.

\textsuperscript{247} \textit{Ibid.}, 131.
This group included Gerry Adams, Martin McGuinness, Danny Morrison, Tom Hartley, and Joe Austin. They were highly critical of many aspects of the PIRA’s leadership, and set out to change its structure and policies immediately. Led by McGuinness, they re-established Northern command of the IRA in 1976. Following the Chief of Staff Seamus Twomey’s arrest in 1977, either Martin McGuinness or Gerry Adams assumed command and set the PIRA on a new course.

In 1977, GHQ’s commissioned a *Staff Report* – subsequently attributed to Gerry Adams – which “recommended a ‘reorganisation and remotivation’ of the IRA, emphasizing that it should ‘return to secrecy and strict discipline.’” The *Staff Report* argued that the IRA should organize into a cell structure, or Active Service Unit (ASU), in which one group of four or five would know only what their objectives and missions were as each cell would operate independently of one another. The PIRA also released the secretive *Green Book* within its ranks, explaining to its members precisely the expected conduct in particular situations, especially interrogation. This measure was taken in large part because of the effectiveness of British intelligence gathering and interrogation methods. These precautions produced big results; “in 1978 there were 465 fewer charges for paramilitary offences than the previous year.”

The new leadership did much more than tend to the military struggle. While in prison, Adams, at the prompting of Danny Morrison, began writing a series of articles

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248 Feeney, 296.

249 Smith, 145.


251 Smith, 145.
under the pseudo pen ‘Brownie’ in Republican News. In these articles, Adams advocated a coordinated effort where military struggle and political agitation worked as complimentary tools to deal with situations as they arose according to their perceived effectiveness.252 Taking a page from Colonel Muammar Qaddafi’s governmental structure in Libya, Adams proposed a system of people’s committees “be established separately from British government structures in republican areas of the North.”253

Adams saw a massive, untapped pool of Catholic community support but realized that the Provisionals could not attain broad-based backing by employing only a military course of action. “As the tearing down process intensifies,” Adams wrote, it was also necessary “for a viable alternative to emerge immediately rather than after the war, it must start now…and it’s up to us to provide it.”254 What Adams and his colleagues were after was political agitation where none formerly existed, to get involved on the grassroots level with the “workers of Ireland and radical trade unionists to establish an ‘irrepressible mass movement (that) will ensure mass support for the continuing armed struggle’.”255 This policy became known as active abstentionism.

In 1979, Adams assumed the role of Vice-President of Sinn Fein. He acknowledged the fact that Ireland could not “be fully re-established solely by military means.”256 What many at the time could not realize was that Adams really sought more than just the active abstentionism that he advocated. When taken from the advantageous

252 Lynn, 2.
253 Moloney, 152.
254 Lynn, 3.
255 Ibid.
256 Ibid., 4.
perspective of hindsight, it is clear that statements like these were really veiled references to electoral participation and an end to abstentionism. By the mid-1980s, electoralism would rapidly evolve into a strategy towards ending abstentionism. However, it would have been absolutely impossible for Adams to suggest any such course of action in the 1970s. It undoubtedly would have led to his expulsion from both Sinn Fein and the Provisional IRA.

The Hunger Strikes

The most immediate and glaring problem faced by republicans and the one in which political agitation could prove to be the more effective tool, was the removal of political status for republican prisoners. There were clearly inherent contradictions within the British claim that IRA men were merely criminals and therefore deserved to be treated as such. As Adams aptly pointed out, prisoners “were sentenced by special courts without juries” while “the vast majority were convicted on allegedly voluntary confessions.”

Since the end of political status in March 1976, IRA prisoners on protest, numbering around 300, had tried a number of tactics to win political status but to no avail. After Kieran Nugent, the first prisoner who would not be afforded political status, proclaimed that the prison guards would have to nail his prison garb on him before he would put it on, republican prisoners took to wrapping a blanket around themselves in protest. By the spring of 1978, the ‘blanket protest’ gave way to a ‘dirty protest.’

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refused to wash, leave their cells, or use toilet facilities and the walls of many of their cells were covered with excreta.\textsuperscript{258} In addition to these tactics, the PIRA also began an assassination campaign of prison guards.\textsuperscript{259}

Following the lead of the Relative Actions Committee - a group composed of prisoner’s families who sought better conditions for their relatives - Jim Gibney, a member of Sinn Fein, undertook to create a national movement in support of the prisoner’s political demands. Gibney convinced PSF leadership to establish the National H-Block/Armagh Committee to bring publicity to the issue at a national level. As Feeney points out, supporters of the committee “did not have to be republicans, did not have to agree with the republican intention that IRA violence was political to support the committee’s demands, especially in view of the degradation going on in the prisons.”\textsuperscript{260} Because of this, the National H-Block/Armagh Committee found supporters in “trade union branches…tenants’ associations and community groups which had been infiltrated or set up by Sinn Fein.”\textsuperscript{261}

On October 27, 1980, several republican prisoners stepped up their protest by undertaking a hunger strike to attain their goal of political recognition. They had five demands: “the right to wear their own clothes, exemption from prison work, freedom of association, extra recreation facilities and more letters and visits, and the return of remission lost on protest.”\textsuperscript{262}  

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{258} Hennessey, 260.
\item \textsuperscript{259} Moloney, 206.
\item \textsuperscript{260} Feeney, 285.
\item \textsuperscript{261} \textit{Ibid.}, 286.
\item \textsuperscript{262} Hennessey, 260.
\end{itemize}
without any loss of life. Brendan Hughes called off the strike after receiving word that the British were sending a document capitulating to republican demands. Hughes called an end to the strike before receiving the document because a fellow hunger striker, Sean McKenna, was perilously close to death. In fact, the document sent merely requested clarification on the position of the strikers and in no way granted any concessions.263 The strike ended with no consequence.

Republican prisoners immediately decided to begin a new hunger strike. It would be led by Bobby Sands, a friend of Gerry Adams who, in 1977, had been sentenced to 14 years for possession of firearms. Sands began his fast on March 1, 1981. This time the PIRA carried forth a new strategy that saw a new prisoner take up his fast each subsequent fortnight. In an attempt to defuse the developing situation, prison authorities effectively granted three of the five demands, with clothing and work left as the only remaining issues.264

Margaret Thatcher, who had been elected Prime Minister of Great Britain in June 1979, was opposed to giving in to any demands from republican prisoners. Prior to the election, “one of her closest confidants and likely Northern Ireland secretary, Airey Neave MP” was assassinated by the republican paramilitary Irish National Liberation Army (INLA).265 Immediately following Thatcher’s election, PIRA attacks escalated. On August 27, the PIRA killed 18 British soldiers of the Parachute Regiment – a group hated by the Catholic community for carrying out the Bloody Sunday massacre. That

263 Adams, A Farther Shore, 13.
264 Conroy, 159.
265 Feeney, 286.
same day the PIRA assassinated Lord Louis Mountbatten and members of his family off the coast of Sligo. Mountbatten “had been the Commander of the British Mediterranean Fleet in World War II, as well as First Sea Lord and Chief of the Defence Staff.” These attacks hardened Thatcher’s position.

When confronted with the hunger strike, Thatcher responded, “We are not prepared to consider special category status for certain groups of people serving sentences for crime. Crime is crime is crime; it is not political.” Thatcher did not see the hunger strike as a threat, but rather saw it as a desperate attempt from a failing movement whose support was dwindling. In fact, Thatcher remarked that for the IRA, the hunger strikes “may well be their last card.”

The hunger strikes may never have had such monumental impact on the Irish political landscape were it not for the opportunity provided with the death of Frank Maguire, MP of Fermanagh-South Tyrone. Maguire, a former IRA Commander who had participated in the Border Campaign of 1956 died just five days after Sands began his fateful fast. Seeing a golden opportunity to gain greater publicity for the hunger strike, Jim Gibney, the same man who had started the National H-Block/Armagh Committee, presented the idea of putting Sands up for election in Maguire’s vacant seat. Adams and Gibney immediately met with the Maguire family to persuade Frank’s younger brother, Noel, to withdraw and allow Sands to run instead.

266 Ibid.
267 Hennessey, 261.
268 Adams, A Farther Shore, 13.
269 Moloney, 211.
270 Feeney, 289.
After Noel agreed, pressure shifted to the SDLP. If they withdrew it would appear that they too supported Sands’ candidacy; however, if they ran in the election, they were liable to split the vote, which would undoubtedly lead to a unionist victory. They too, decided to stand down.271 Sands now stood alone against Ulster Unionist Party candidate Harry West. On April 9, the 40th day of Sands’ hunger strike, 86.6 percent of the electorate turned out for the vote. Of a total of 62,818 votes, Sands won by a margin of 1,446.

Seeing that the British would not give in - even after Sands had been elected to British Parliament - many in the PIRA sought to exact revenge immediately. Adams recognized that violence during this critical period would be counter-productive. The IRA released a leaflet to this effect in republican areas of Belfast after Sands’ election victory, warning its inhabitants:

The Republican movement will not tolerate any acts of vandalism or destruction against our people. Anyone caught hijacking essential services such as milk floats, bread vans, etc., stoning private cars, looting, or using the situation for personal gain will be dealt with most severely.272

With reporters present from all over the world, the Provisionals sought to maximize the propaganda value at this most critical time.

Bobby Sands’ death on May 5, 1981 received international attention. His funeral, on May 7, was attended by an estimated 100,000 people, including three members of the European Parliament - Ireland, Italy, and Belgium – as well as the Iranian ambassador to Sweden. There were demonstrations throughout Europe and in America, as tens of

271 Ibid.

272 Conroy, 156.
thousands marched in Paris, Brussels, Athens, The Hague, Milan, and New York.\textsuperscript{273} This was the type of victory that no military campaign could ever win for the republican movement.

In all, ten hunger strikers starved to death between May and October of 1981. During that time, two other hunger strikers won seats in Ireland’s parliament as Kieran Doherty was elected TD for Cavan-Monaghan and Paddy Agnew TD for Louth while Sands’ election agent, Owen Carron, won the Fermanagh-South Tyrone seat vacated upon Sands’ death.\textsuperscript{274} “In the district council elections of May 1981 (in Northern Ireland), candidates from several parties campaigning on the H-Block issue polled 51,000 votes and won 36 seats.”\textsuperscript{275} Clearly, many throughout Ireland, North and South, disagreed with the British Government’s assessment of republicanism. Common criminals do not engender popular support, nor do they typically garner votes in elections.

\textbf{The Armalite and the Ballot Box}

It has been stated that the hunger strikes greatest legacy “in the long term was the radicalizing effect of the protest on the Catholic population.”\textsuperscript{276} Father Des Wilson observed that after the hunger strikes:

There were people on marches…who had never been on a march before. It was now possible to speak respectfully of the IRA. To have done so before would have been to invite condemnation by Church and state…In

\textsuperscript{273} Ibid., 168.

\textsuperscript{274} Gerry Adams, \textit{A Farther Shore}, 14-15.

\textsuperscript{275} Hennessey, 262.

\textsuperscript{276} \textit{Ibid}.
Ireland a hunger strike is something which governments ignore at their own peril.277

David McKittrick, Belfast bureau chief of the Irish Times put it thus:

In the prison dispute they [British Government] tackled the Provos head on, making the assumption that the Catholic community, faced with making a stark choice between the government and the prisoners, would favour the government. They were horribly irrevocably wrong.278

The Provisionals had unequivocally received the biggest victory they had ever had.

The aftermath of the hunger strikes fundamentally altered the conflict in Northern Ireland. The main effect for the Provisional movement was that it pushed Sinn Fein into electoral politics at a pace that otherwise would have been impossible to achieve. Abstentionism was a policy so long-held and adhered to within the republican movement that one of Adams’ top advisers once confided to him in 1980 that it would take years before Sinn Fein would be allowed by its conservative members to contest Westminster elections.279

However, once the conservative elements within the movement were able to see the potential base of support that existed within the Northern Irish populous, a new opportunity existed which was impossible to ignore. Over the next few years, Adams would maneuver around his hard-line opponents within the IRA and move Sinn Fein to a position of not only contesting elections, but ultimately to taking their seats if elected. In

277 Ibid.
278 Conroy, 181.
the meantime, Adams and his allies pushed for a policy of permanent electoral participation on an abstentionist platform whilst continuing the military struggle.

In October 1981, at Sinn Fein’s *Ard Fheis*, Danny Morrison put forth the question: ‘Who here really believes we can win the war through the ballot box? But will anyone here object if, with a ballot paper in one hand and the Armalite in the other, we take power in Ireland?’ The answer within the republican movement was a resounding no. Sinn Fein was throwing its hat permanently into electoral politics.

In the 1982 Northern Ireland Assembly elections, Sinn Fein received one-third of the Catholic vote (10 percent of the total vote), securing five seats. In the general elections of June 1983, Sinn Fein increased its electoral share from the previous year, receiving 102,701 votes (13.4 percent of the total vote), and Gerry Adams won a seat as MP for West Belfast, a stunning victory. Following these favorable outcomes, which had far exceeded expectations, Sinn Fein was able to assume the ascendant position within the republican movement, a role which henceforth would increase steadily. The SDLP, which had captured 17.9 percent of the total vote, was under impending threat to lose majority support within the nationalist community.

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280 Hennessey, 263.
281 Conroy, 216.
282 Smith, 161.
PART V: THE SEEDS OF PEACE

The Anglo-Irish Agreement; Hume’s Victory

The catalyst that John Hume needed in order to alter the dynamics of the conflict in the North was found with the awakening of the dormant Sinn Fein into electoral participation. The growth of Sinn Fein was naturally an alarming occurrence to the British government. The SDLP and the Irish Government were just as concerned with Sinn Fein’s successful entry onto the political stage. The SDLP and Irish Government were closely aligned, sharing many of the same principles; Sinn Fein was a wild card beyond the control of either. The prospect of Sinn Fein overtaking the SDLP in the North was seen to have the potential to “destabilise the whole island.”

The SDLP’s calls for a New Ireland Forum were finally answered. “The decision to establish the New Ireland Forum in 1983 was clearly related to a pressing and immediate political crisis, namely, the threat posed by the rise of Sinn Fein to the SDLP”. This view is one held generally by scholars of Northern Irish history. Sinn Fein was a pariah on the Irish political scene, and the established leaders were intent on keeping the present balance of power intact.

Following the election of Garret Fitzgerald as Taoiseach in November 1982, the Irish Government and the SDLP worked ever more closely to come to a joint agreement so as to have something constructive to offer jointly to Britain.

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283 Feeney, 313.

284 Bew and Patterson, 127.
In 1983, all elected representatives, with the exception of Sinn Fein, were invited to join the New Ireland Forum. This forum placed SDLP’s representatives for the first time on par with the TDs from the parties in the Dail.285

At the end of the Forum, in May 1984, a report was issued which “stated a redefinition of Irish nationalism that was agreed to by all parties in the Dail and with the SDLP.”286

The Forum produced a subsection in its report entitled The Economic Consequences of the Division of Ireland Since 1920, laying out the costs of the Troubles to both the British and Irish governments through 1984. “Since 1969, the estimated total direct cost, in 1982 prices, is IR£5,500 million (equiv. $6,501m.) incurred by the British Exchequer in respect of the North and IR£1,100 million incurred by the Irish Exchequer in the South.”287 Additionally, Catholics were still suffering in the economic sector. An astounding 30.2 percent of the eligible male population was unemployed in 1981. This figure was expected to hit 35 percent by 1985. Protestants still dominated all the ‘top managerial, professional, scientific and technical jobs’; ‘less Catholics are in the security forces now than 15 years ago.’288

In terms of human costs, the numbers are equally staggering. “More than 2,300 people had died as a result of the violence since 1969; more than 24,000 had been injured or maimed in 43,000 incidents of terrorism.”289 It was again the Catholic population that had suffered most in the North, with 703 of the civilian fatalities occurring within the

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285 Ibid., 315.
286 Ibid.
287 Ibid., 3.22.
289 Arthur, 199.
Catholic community within this time-span. On top of that, Northern Ireland was reported to have the ‘highest number of prisoners per head of population in Western Europe.’

The New Ireland Forum sought to define what Irish nationalism meant in the 1980s. The Forum began by explaining how the 1920 Act was the result of unionist intimidation. Because of the nature 1920 settlement, the ‘rights of nationalists in the North to political expression of their Irish identity and to effective participation in the institutions of government’ was denied.

The Forum thus sought to address the problem of identity on both sides. On the nationalist side it was argued that the Irish dimension was in fact in accordance with the political reality in the North; what’s more, the Report also advocated a reciprocal acceptance of the unionist position in the North as well. By outlining the toll taken on the North because of the Troubles, particularly amongst the Catholic community, the Report demanded urgent action and a fundamental change amongst the leaders of the nationalist population in their approach to dealing with the conditions that divided Northerners.

The Republic formally acknowledged for the first time the unionist identity and the points of identity that unionists wished most to preserve, namely their British-ness, their Protestantism, and the economic advantage provided by the British link. The Forum was attempting, for the first time in the history of the Republic, to explain to unionists that their differences could be accommodated in a united Ireland. For the nationalist camp, this was progressive thinking and a major step forward.

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292 Hennessey, 267.
What the Forum was essentially trying to get at was that unity was and always will be the fundamental constitutional goal of nationalists. However, the use of violence was ruled out by the parties present to the Forum as a legitimate means toward achieving that end. The Forum recommended three different forms of a settlement: an independent 32-county Republic; joint sovereignty of the North shared between Dublin and London; and a federal/con-federal model of unity where the North would have its own parliament with equal representation to that of Dublin’s parliament.\(^{293}\)

Initially Britain responded coolly to the work of the Forum. Thatcher famously dismissed each of the Forum proposals out of hand when asked about them in a press conference following a summit with Garett Fitzgerald. Thanks to the prior efforts of John Hume, Thatcher’s government was pressed into action by the Irish and American governments. The Four Horsemen criticized Thatcher’s brusque dismissal of the Forum while US President Ronald Reagan commended ‘the Irish statesmen for their courageous and forthright efforts recently embodied in the report of the New Ireland Forum.’\(^{294}\)

Through American influence and a gradual coming together of Dublin and London, the Anglo-Irish Agreement, a watershed in Anglo-Irish relations, was signed on November 15, 1985. The agreement was ratified by each government and registered with the United Nations under Article 102 of the Charter of the UN in December.\(^{295}\) Following

\(^{293}\) “New Ireland Report,” Solutions section.

\(^{294}\) Arthur, 217.

\(^{295}\) Ibid., 219.
its ratification, the United States “duly signed legislation providing for aid of $50 million to assist the economic and social development of both parts of Ireland.”

It was the first formal external acknowledgement of Dublin’s legitimate right to be involved in the affairs of the North. The Agreement cemented London-Dublin cooperation in the North, creating a secretariat near Belfast that was manned by representatives of each government. In return, Dublin would step up its role in security. This would include cross-border cooperation between the two security forces and extradition of suspected terrorists. Above all, both parties agreed that there could be no change in the constitutional status of Northern Ireland until consent was achieved by a majority. If and when such a majority did exist, both governments would recognize and support a change of constitutional status. Violence of course was ruled out as a legitimate option to solving any of the North’s many problems.

For John Hume, the Anglo-Irish Agreement was the culmination of a process begun ten years previous. To date, it was the finest hour for the man and his party. He had headed off a major scare from Sinn Fein and reasserted the SDLP as the recognized, responsible, legitimate voice of nationalism in the North. Over the next several years, election results would bear out this new-found support. What’s more, Hume had finally achieved implementation of the long-sought “Irish dimension”, which was, to his thinking, a major prerequisite towards a final settlement.

The suggestion that Hume had made to President Carter about financial assistance was being honored by President Reagan, illustrating how fully, and literally, the US had

296 Guelke, 532.

297 Feeney, 329.
bought into Hume's policies. Finally, Hume had brought his party together with the Dublin and British governments and had worked a solution that excluded the republican movement from any negotiated settlement so long as they continued their campaign of violence.

**The Groundwork for Peace**

The 1980s saw the nationalist and republican movement fight for the initiative in the North as never before. Following the hunger strikes it appeared that Sinn Fein was poised to seriously challenge the SDLP as leader of the nationalist community. With the signing of the Anglo-Irish, Sinn Fein was officially cordonned off from legitimate political participation. However, the PIRA’s Northern leadership, led by Gerry Adams, had set the republican movement upon a course that would force an end to the armed conflict. By contesting elections on a permanent basis, albeit under the banner of abstention, the level of approval – or more accurately, disapproval – for the IRA’s war was out in plain sight. Within years, the contradictions inherent within the “armalite and ballot box” approach would become apparent and Sinn Fein would seek a way out.

Gerry Adams had advocated the republican movement taking a more active role in the politics of day-to-day life since the late 1970s. What only a few realized at the time was the extent to which Adams was willing to change the republican movement’s ideologies and policies in order to achieve the movement’s ultimate aim, unity. In fact Adams engaged in back-channel talks as early as 1982 about the possibility of ending the PIRA’s war. The process by which Adams went about running-down the PIRA’s
campaign was an extremely difficult undertaking and one which required incremental steps and careful maneuvering.

Adams was intent on creating a fully modern, sophisticated, and competitive political movement in the North. Ultimately, Adams sought to build a party that could lead all of a united Ireland. For this ambition to have any hope of success, the republican leader would need to introduce dramatic changes within both Sinn Fein and the IRA. Ultimately, the IRA’s war would have to end for any possibility of Sinn Fein being present at negotiations for a new agreement. The movement towards change began in 1982.

Adams began highly secretive talks with Father Alec Reid in October 1982 following the South Armagh IRA’s abduction of a UDR sergeant. Father Reid, a Redemptorist Priest from West Belfast, had been an active figure on the republican front since the 1970s. Reid frequented the Long Kesh and later H-Block prisons in the North, and had been present in the H-Blocks throughout the hunger strike crisis. Reid was also instrumental in breaking up a violent feud between the PIRA and OIRA in 1975.298 Following Sergeant Cochrane’s abduction, Reid, who had been inactive politically following the hunger strikes, decided to meet with Adams for a discussion.

Although Reid has never told his side of the story, he is recognized by historians of the conflict as an instrumental catalyst for the peace process. Moloney has referred to him as the man “who initiated, devised, and nurtured many of the ideological innovations that made Gerry Adams’s journey possible.”299 Reid’s presence would prove invaluable

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298 Feeney, 346.

299 Moloney, 225.
in the secret negotiations that led ultimately to the signing of a negotiated peace settlement in 1998.

Reid engaged Adams in dialogue while Cochrane’s life hung in the balance. While Cochrane’s fate remained unsure, a loyalist group led by Lennie Murphy, kidnapped a random Catholic civilian to even the score. Murphy was the ringleader of the Shankill Butchers, and was himself suspected of murdering eighteen people during his lifetime. Murphy and his cohorts had stolen a black cab one night and planned on picking up the first Catholic they could find. A Catholic civilian, Joe Donnegan, fell prey to their trap.\(^{300}\)

In the aftermath of this horrific ordeal, Cochrane and Donnegan were both killed. A few weeks later, Lennie Murphy was killed by the IRA. The success of Sinn Fein in the Assembly elections earlier in the month seemed to signal a new wave of violence; after all, a vote for Sinn Fein could easily be interpreted as a vote for the continuation of violence. From an outsiders perspective it would have been impossible to anticipate the \textit{volte face} that was to occur within the republican movement.

While in talks, Reid became convinced that with Adams there was a leader capable of bringing the republican movement around to a position committed to non-violence. Adams made clear that many of the PIRA’s fundamental principles were expendable. During their talks, Adams hinted at the conditions necessary for a PIRA cease-fire. To begin with, there would have to be a fundamental change to the 1920 Government of Ireland Act. The right of self-determination had to be given to the island

\(^{300}\text{Ibid., 222.}\)
as a whole in addition to the people of the North. The British also needed to give up their role as supreme authority in the North, the role guaranteed by Section 75 of the Act. Adams also made it clear that he would be willing to give up the demand for the immediate withdrawal of the British Army - an obvious, but necessary concession.301

Reid quickly stressed the need for dialogue to begin between the outcast Sinn Fein and the other sources of power at play within the North. Eventually Reid would persuade the Catholic Church, the SDLP, as well as the Irish and British governments of the necessity of talks between themselves and Sinn Fein and the PIRA. Reid convinced the various parties of Adams’ willingness to enter fully into the political process if Britain were to unequivocally state their neutrality in the North. If this guarantee were forthcoming, Adams signaled he would be ready to declare a PIRA cease-fire.302

**Tactics vs. Principles: Adams’ Victory**

For Adams, to attempt the pursuance of a scaling-back or ending of the PIRA’s campaign against Britain, cautious maneuvering was required. He could not simply announce a desire to change the IRA’s principles. Given the history of the movement’s ideology, any person who seeks to alter the movement’s ideology runs the risk of expulsion, of execution, or of creating a splintering of the movement, as in 1969. For Adams, the issue that split the republican movement in that year, anti-abstentionism, was the next logical step for him to take up in the ultimate politicization of the movement.

301 Ibid., 271.
302 Ibid., 272.
Adams, of course, had the advantage of hindsight. He had seen the way Goulding’s proposed policy changes sought to change too much, too soon. In the aftermath of the violence of August 1969, in which Catholic civilians were the chief victims, Goulding was seeking to run-down the IRA. At a time when many in the movement, particularly Northerners, were calling for the IRA to pick up its role as Catholic defender, Goulding’s actions seemed extraordinarily ill-timed, betraying the people he was sworn to protect during their hour of need. The militancy of many of traditional republicans was something that had to be accounted for and taken seriously.

Goulding also sought to end abstentionism in one fell swoop. Instead of an incremental approach towards ending this policy, Goulding sought to have Sinn Fein enter Stormont, Leinster, and Westminster simultaneously. This was an alarming prospect to many in the movement; abstention was one the founding principles of the republican movement, introduced by Sinn Fein founder Arthur Griffith in 1906. For Adams to be successful where Goulding failed, he had to learn from these important lessons in order to avoid another major split.

Adams began laying the groundwork early for the ultimate dissolution of the abstentionist policy. The IRA’s constitution explicitly forbids even the mention of the abstentionist policy. Section 1:

Participation in Leinster House, Stormont or Westminster is strictly forbidden and in any other subservient parliament, if any. Any Volunteer who, by a resolution, proposes entry into Leinster House, Stormont of Westminster automatically dismisses himself from membership of Óglaigh na hÉireann [IRA].

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303 Ibid., 288.
304 O’Brien, 5.
Adams set out against abstentionism by first removing the ban on discussion. At the 1983 Ard Fheis Adams pushed through a motion, 208 to 98, changing the constitution of the IRA so that ‘no aspect of the constitution and its rules be close to discussion’ in the future.\(^{305}\) The way was thus opened to begin hammering home the need for change.

The most logical place for abstention to first be jettisoned would be at Leinster house in Dublin. The viewpoint that the institutions of the South were illegitimate and thus should not be recognized harked back to the 1920 Act and the Anglo-Irish Treaty, which formalized partition. In the immediate aftermath of the Agreement such a position was understandable and even gained significant support. By the 1980s however, Sinn Fein’s policy of non-recognition was entirely untenable. At the 1983 Bodenstown Address, Adams, who had just won West Belfast, voiced his opinion on the matter.

> We must realize that ordinary people…accept the Free State institutions as legitimate. To ignore this political reality is to…undermine the development of our struggle…A firm foothold and a relevant organization in Souther politics is vital. We must apply ourselves to that objective…we must…develop our republicanism so that it meets today’s political conditions.\(^{306}\)

Sinn Fein’s completely underwhelming election results in the South pay tribute to how far out of touch Sinn Fein was with the South’s electorate. Between 1981 and 1986, they never polled better than 2 percent in the Republic. Abstention was seen by republican leaders as a major cause of these results.

The 1984 European Parliamentary election was another incremental step for Sinn Fein on the road to full electoral participation. Taking an abstentionist position in these

\(^{305}\) Feeney, 326.

elections, to deny the legitimacy of the EC, would be, as Martin McGuinness explained, ‘madness.’ Feeney further demonstrates that the discussion of abstention in the European elections was “in reality…the way to discussing abolishing abstention from the Dail at the next Ard Fheis.” In the meantime, however, Adams and his followers would have to contend with rivals.

In 1985, Ivor Bell, formerly a member of the Army Council and in 1982 Chief of Staff, was expelled from the movement because of his disagreement with the direction with which the republican movement was moving. Bell argued openly against the IRA’s donation of a large sum of money to the 1985 local election campaign. For this, Bell and three others sympathetic with his argument were expelled for ‘factionalism’. By outing Bell, Adams had seen off a threat to his role as republican leader of Belfast. The real threat, however, lay in the South, as Ruari O Bradaigh and Daithi O Conaill, traditionalists within the movement, were becoming increasingly suspicious of Adams’ leadership and aims.

At the 1985 Ard Fheis, Adams’ allies (although not Adams) argued against abstentionism from the standpoint of practicality. They argued that the weapon of abstentionism should be used as a tactic, not a principle. They also stressed the impact that their entry into electoral politics had during hunger strikes on the North and around the world. Although the proposed motion to change abstention from a principle to a tactic failed by 20 votes, the tide was certainly turning within the republican movement.

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308 Feeney, 326.

309 Ibid., 327.
Sinn Fein secured 59 seats in the local council elections that year and “reaffirmed Sinn Fein as a force to be reckoned with in northern politics.” The stage was set for a showdown at the following year’s Ard Fheis between the Adams and O Bradaigh camps.

The most important threat that anti-abstentionism posed to traditionalists within the IRA was that it was a move towards normalcy. To traditionalists, it seemed to possess the quality of counter-insurgency, pushing Sinn Fein into line with the rest of the partitionist institutions involved in the conflict. It was the first step towards the end of the revolution. O Bradaigh certainly fell under this category of thinker. He wailed against the Adams policy. “They will be signing their own extinction as revolutionaries not because they want to but because it cannot be otherwise.”

Looking back, O Bradaigh’s words were proved prophetic. Given the fact that Adams had sent out peace feelers as early as 1982, it can be argued that his policy of anti-abstention was actually part of a much larger plan to end the PIRA’s war altogether and enter into politics fully. After all, the more legitimate Sinn Fein became, the more pressure there would be for them to de-rail the IRA. In fact, Father Reid had already met with Taoiseach Charles Haughey as Adams’ mouthpiece, where it was agreed that dropping abstention was a necessary condition for negotiations to go further. Of course, those people that Adams sought to convince could not have known this; had this knowledge been available, Adams would undoubtedly have been expelled or executed for betraying the republican cause.

310 Ibid., 328.
311 Smith, 171.
312 Moloney, 289.
For the time being, Adams had to address fears from the militants within the PIRA. Thus, Adams’ strategy towards attaining his anti-abstentionist policy was complemented by actually stepping up the armed campaign over the short-term. Indeed, in 1985 “the IRA had used the largest tonnage of explosives of any year of its campaign.”

With the Northern leadership’s newfound allies in the middle-east, Adams was able to hint at bigger things to come.

The IRA was in position, Adams hinted, to produce a “Tet Offensive” of sorts. This was all possible thanks to Libyan leader, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi. The Northern leaders had arranged for a large shipment of arms from Libya, enough to significantly escalate the war.

The reward would be breathtaking: about 240 tons of weapons and explosives, including surface-to-air missiles; heavy-calibre machine guns capable of smashing through reinforced concrete walls from two miles out; rocket-propelled grenades; ten tons of Semtex explosives for more powerful and more varied bombs; 2,000 AK-47 rifles and about 2,000,000 rounds of ammunition…Gaddafi also gave the IRA about £2 million in two payments.

With the escalation of violence in 1985 and this new stash of arms, most of which was hidden throughout the Republic in underground bunkers via the Wicklow coast, any suggestion that Adams was attempting to run-down the IRA’s campaign would seem absurd. If anything, he could argue that the IRA was preparing to step it up.

Thus when the 1986 Ard Fheis arrived, Adams and allies had effectively maneuvered around the mistakes made by Cathal Goulding. The chance of producing a

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313 Feeney, 327.
314 O’Brien, 10.
split was minimal. Adams and McGuinness both spoke of the importance of ending abstention in the Dail. Adams harped on the need to politicize the movement while also ridding it of its obstinate ideology.

We are at our weakest when we are forced into a static political position where the more powerful forces of imperialism can be employed to isolate us…The central issue is not abstentionism. It is merely a problematic, deeply-rooted and emotive symptom of the lack of republican politics and the failure of successive generations of republicans to grasp the centrality, the primacy and the fundamental need for republican politics.315

McGuinness stressed to the hardliners, the leadership’s commitment to armed resistance:

I reject any such suggestion and I reject the notion that entering Leinster House would mean an end to Sinn Fein’s unapologetic support for the right of Irish people to oppose in arms the British forces of occupation. That, my friends, is a principle which a minority in this hall might doubt but which I believe all our opponents clearly understand. Our position is clear and will never change. The war against British rule must continue until freedom is achieved.316

These words would not hold true in the long-run, but at the time they produced their desired effect.

In the end, the vote to end abstentionism was a foregone conclusion. Needing a majority of two-thirds in order to change the constitution of the PIRA, Adams’ camp left nothing to chance. The vote was cleverly manipulated - some would allege rigged - by his leadership and the vote passed 429 to 161 with 38 abstaining. As Moloney explains:

At the 1985 conference, the year before, the motion seeking to define abstentionism as a tactic and not a principle had been lost by 181 votes to 161; a total of 341 delegates had cast their votes. Yet just a year later the


316 Moloney, 295.
number of delegates at the Ard Fheis soared to 628, almost double; the following year, in 1987, it reverted to its normal 350 or so delegates.

Moloney goes on to explain how this swell occurred. According to inside sources in the PIRA:

They went about it in two ways. Over a two-year period beforehand released IRA prisoners loyal to Adams were ordered to join Sinn Fein cumainn [branches] and take them over by replacing hostile or unsympathetic officers…The other way was that they just invented cumainn. All you needed was five names, and you got two delegates to the Ard Fheis. They were set up all over the country in Belfast…There must have been a hundred or more of these cumainn but after 1986 they just petered out.317

With that, Adams’ victory was secured.

After the vote, O Bradaigh and O Connaill walked out of the Ard Fheis, repeating the walk-out of 1969. This time though, they would not have many followers. Confined mainly to old-school republicans who lived in the South, O Bradaigh formed Republican Sinn Fein (RSF), proclaiming “allegiance to the 1916 Proclamation, the declaration of independence by the first Dail in 1919 and the non-recognition of British created institutions.”318 O Bradaigh summed up how the British supposedly were reacting to Provisional Sinn Fein’s apparent capitulation: “Ah, it took 65 years but we have them at last…they have come in from the wilderness and we have them now.”319

317 Ibid., 296.

318 Smith, 170.

CONCLUSION

The years 1985 and 1986 marked extraordinary changes on the nationalist and republican fronts of Northern Irish politics. The Troubles were moving into a new phase, although few could have recognized it at the time. John Hume’s work towards securing the Anglo-Irish Agreement was a much publicized victory for the man and his party. At its most basic, fundamental level, the Agreement formalized the commitment of all parties involved in the agreement to exclude Sinn Fein from any negotiations in the future so long as the IRA’s campaign of violence continued.

Although the Anglo-Irish Agreement was certainly a watershed moment in Anglo-Irish relations, it could not have proven to affect change so quickly had not republican leader Gerry Adams already been moving in the same direction. Whereas Hume’s calls for peace and unity through consent were out in the open, Adams’ similar aspirations were shrouded in secrecy and ambiguity. The peace process, begun in 1982 through the work of a determined Catholic priest, would continue secretly throughout the 1980s, culminating in sustained dialogue between Adams and Hume, Adams and Dublin, and Adams and London - all through the mediation of Fr. Reid.

Northern Ireland was indeed moving toward peace. However, Adams’ appeasement of the IRA in attempt to secure his anti-abstention policy would prove to produce violence for years to come. Ultimately, the contradictions inherent within the armalite and ballot box approach would produce a situation where calls for the cessation of violence from within the republican movement reached an unprecedented level. The republican movement had shed much of its rigid dogma, but the extent to which Adams
was willing to change republican ideology and principle would become apparent in a few years. By 1990, Sinn Fein was espousing the aforementioned core principles of the SDLP. It was an extraordinary volte face, showing the monumental shift that the Adams leadership represented to the republican movement, where pragmatism reigned supreme over principle. By the end of 1986, the groundwork had been laid for the peace process to begin in earnest.
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