Northern Ireland: Troubles Brewing

by

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Introduction

The Troubles, as they are known to the populace, did not erupt on any specific date, but emerged as the result of several years of escalating incidents between Catholics and Protestants. This latest episode of the long-standing conflict between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland has been going on for thirty years, and although a peace agreement has been reached, a peaceful resolution to this costly struggle is not yet in sight. The Troubles have been protracted and costly in every sense of the word. From the time of the first civil rights marches in 1968 the cost, in both human and material terms, has been steadily mounting. Between 1968 and 1994, over 3,500 people died and over 35,000 were injured in Northern Ireland as a direct result of the fighting. Robberies, bombings, assassinations, and terror tactics spread to engulf Great Britain and the Irish Republic, greatly decreasing the common person's sense of security and impinging on the populace's personal freedom. Civil rights in Northern Ireland have been seriously eroded, and freedom in the name of safety has been sacrificed to some extent in both Great Britain and the Irish Republic (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 51). In material terms, Northern Ireland drains over £3 billion annually from the British treasury while increased security and border patrols cost the Irish Republic over one-quarter of its annual budget.
The economy of Northern Ireland has also been deeply affected by the ongoing conflict. Manufacturing employment in Northern Ireland has declined by over 40 per cent since the beginning of the conflict, increasing the province’s dependence on Great Britain for subsidies to maintain its current standard of living (see fig. 1). While part of this decline can be attributed to the decline of the world economy in the early 1970s, the ‘branch plant’ structure of industry in Northern Ireland has also contributed to the sharp deterioration in economic conditions within the region. These foreign-owned assembly or secondary production branch plants closed down when violence increased operating costs in the province. The fact that these plants lacked research and development or marketing facilities and were secondary (as opposed to main) plants meant that these low priority plants in Northern Ireland could shift their production elsewhere at minimal cost to their foreign owners. The constant threat of bombings, high cost of security, and lack of a stable internal market made plant openings unattractive and drove away large manufacturers in great numbers (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 84). In fact, only massive growth in government and security service jobs held off increases in unemployment figures until the second oil shock of 1979, when Northern Ireland joined the rest of the world in recession. It is estimated that without annual infusions of aid from Great Britain, the living standard of Northern Ireland would approach that of Mexico or Argentina (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 90).

In examining the events that led to this human tragedy, the case study of Northern Ireland is presented as follows: (A) Cultural Identity, (B) Political Power/Access, and (C) Economic Participation. Section D (Onset of Conflict) explores the reasons that a society heading towards real pluralism in the early 1960s degenerated into internecine violence by the end of the decade.

Cultural Identity

To understand the historical enmity between the Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland, it is necessary to understand past conflicts between the two groups and to examine the reasons they have remained separate throughout their history. Catholic Ireland was ruled by Great Britain for a considerable portion of its history, from the twelfth century to 1920. During that time, there were numerous revolts by the Catholics against their Protestant landlords. The historic province of Ulster, a stronghold of Gaelic culture in the north of Ireland, successfully resisted British encroachments until the Plantation of 1609. Earlier waves of colonisation had supplanted the Irish gentry with Protestant British landlords, leaving the bulk of the population Catholic and Irish. The settlement of Ulster in 1609, by contrast, was massive in scale and resulted in the intrusion of a Protestant culture that was completely alien to its Catholic inhabitants (Darby 1976, 3). Massacres of both Protestants and Catholics took place throughout the 1600s, as the two sides battled for supremacy and the right to occupy the land each now called home. The most important of these to the folklore of Ulster was the Battle of the Boyne in 1690, in which the Protestants scored a massive victory over the Catholics.

Mistrust and bad feelings resulting from the colonisation of Ireland by Protestant settlers were followed by centuries of political and social segregation of Catholics and Protestants in all of Ireland. After the victory of William of Orange (the Protestant challenger who deposed the Catholic king, James II), laws were enacted by the all-Protestant Parliament of Ireland barring Catholics from all offices, land ownership, schooling, and other avenues leading toward wealth and education (Darby 1976, 4). These laws effectively entrenched the existing hatreds between the two communities and glorified violent action by one community to ‘defend’ itself from the other. The conditions created as a result of these laws became important during the early part of the twentieth century, when escalating violence and rebellion forced Great Britain to consider granting Ireland some form of ‘Home Rule’, a limited form of self-government. Both Catholic and Protestant extremists rejected the plan out of hand. The Catholics, led by Sinn Féin, felt that only full independence could satisfy them. The Protestant Unionists, on the other hand, greatly feared being ruled by the Catholic majority and went as far as to threaten the secession of Northern Ireland from Great Britain into a sovereign state if the British did not back away from their plans to give all of Ireland Home Rule. The resulting compromise was the partitioning of Ireland into the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland in 1920 (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 24).

The Partition of Ireland did little to ease the sectarian mistrust and separateness
between Catholics and Protestants left in the six counties of Ulster which were
devolved to Unionist rule. Each community continued to be defined by its religious
affiliation, with little mixture between the two groups. Education, neighbourhoods,
workplaces, entertainment, and numerous other social activities remained
segregated. The names of places also continue to be used to denote religious and
national affiliation. For example, those aligned with the Protestant Unionists call
Londonderry\(^1\) by its official name, while those of Nationalist sentiment refer to it as
Derry (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 15).

After the Partition of Ireland in 1920, sporadic violence continued between the two
communities. The violence was cyclic in nature and often coincided with downturns
in the local economy (e.g., riots during the depression of the 1930s). Conversely,
when the economy picked up, as it did in the post-war years, ethnic violence
subsided; for example, during a peak of the economy in the 1950s, the Irish
Republican Army (IRA) was unable to launch a successful bid for secession due to
apathy in the Catholic community (Darby 1976, 13). The pattern of separate
settlements, school districts, and employment, however, continued as before.

The physical segregation of the two communities can be attributed to various
reasons, not all of which stem from a fear of violence. For instance, as most
schooling is conducted by religious denomination, it makes sense for Protestant and
Catholic families to find housing closer to their schools. Church attendance is high
in Northern Ireland, with the church community providing the structure for social
interaction. In addition, marriages in Northern Ireland primarily take place with
people from the same local area, creating elaborate family-based structures that
tend to be exclusionary and segregated (Darby 1976, 37). These trends tend to
isolate and insulate local communities from outside influences, preserving old
attitudes towards outsiders and considerable conformity within the community.

Like most cultural differences, the roots of the Protestant-Catholic enmity in
Northern Ireland are buried in the distant past, with fresh incidents only serving to
reopen old wounds and solidify negative stereotypes. The siege mentality of the
Unionists continues to stem from the fortified townships in which they were forced
to live following the ‘Plantation’ of 1609. Thus, each new threat is perceived as dire,
within the context of brutal pogroms which took place hundreds of years before. For
example, in 1964, the Unionists rioted in response to the legal Nationalist opposition
party flying the Irish Tricolour, rather than the Union Jack, from their local
headquarters in Belfast (Darby 1976, 14).

The Catholics still feel as if they have an alien culture living amongst them. This
feeling has been enhanced through the separation of the two communities and the
continued enforcement of the Special Powers Act of 1922. This act, designed to
combat IRA resistance to Partition, was left in force until well after the beginning of
the Troubles, thus perpetuating a climate of mistrust that has yet to be dispelled
(Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 28).

With the exception of their competition for the same resources, the two
communities can be characterised by a lack of contact. Their lack of contact has
created feelings of deep distrust between the Catholic and Protestant communities.
This work argues that those deep feelings do not condition daily relations, but flare
up in response to specific events. For example, the IRA started a new campaign for
secession between 1956 and 1962; however, its decision in 1962 to renounce
military activity resulted from the fact that its “defeat owed more to apathy than to
the efficiency of law enforcement machinery” (Darby 1976, 13). In other words,
since the Catholic community did not have a strong perception of relative
deprivation, the feelings of mistrust and hatred did not surface. As a result, the IRA
was unable to generate support for its secessionist campaign.

The IRA was able to re-establish itself and its military methods in 1969 / 1970, as a
result of the rising frustrations of the Catholic populace, rather than the continuing
ethnic hatreds between the two communities. Many authors have noted that
violence in Northern Ireland stems from reactions to real (or perceived)
discrimination between the two groups. This discrimination has a long historical
record, dating to the fifteenth century when it was sanctioned as a tool to pacify an
occupied land and settle a Protestant populace who would prove more loyal to the
Crown than its Catholic inhabitants. Sections B and C address the extent and forms
of the discrimination in terms of political influence and economic participation,
Political Access/Power

Politics in Northern Ireland have always been dominated by the necessity for Protestant control of the government and its processes. The requirement that a Protestant majority be created in Northern Ireland was a major determinant in drawing the boundary for the Partition of Ireland. Northern Ireland is composed of six of the original nine counties of the province of Ulster. The remaining three counties of Ulster were not included in Northern Ireland due to the fact that the higher percentage of Catholics in these counties posed a threat to Protestant control of the country. As illustrated (see map 1), only those counties of Ulster province that had a Protestant population of at least 30 per cent were included in the Unionist enclave of Northern Ireland.

At the time of Partition, the government of Great Britain devolved authority to the two governments of the Irish Isles. The Irish Free State in the south (which later left the Commonwealth to become the Republic of Ireland), and Northern Ireland were each allowed to elect their own parliaments, implement local laws, and, in general, conduct their own internal affairs. Stormont, the parliament of Northern Ireland, was given control over all of its own affairs, with the exception of the right to mint money, conduct foreign affairs, and raise an army; however, it was able to circumvent the latter through the creation of paramilitary 'police auxiliaries'.

Under representation of Catholics extended throughout most levels of Northern Ireland's government. For example, the proportional representation (PR) system left in place by the British ensured that the Catholics would control about 40 per cent of the local councils; but, the ending of PR and the redrawing of local government boundaries by the Unionist parliament at Stormont quickly reversed the trend. While Catholic Nationalists won control of twenty-five out of the eighty local councils in 1920, the gerrymandering of 1922 ensured that in the 1924 elections they controlled only two out of eighty local councils (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 29).

The redrawn boundaries were particularly effective as a result of new legislation introduced to restrict voting rights. Two categories of voters were formed to ensure Protestant dominance at the polls: (1) the 'ratepayers', primary occupiers of a household as either tenants or owners, and (2) persons who owned commercial property valued at £10 or more per year. As only two people per house were allowed to vote, the ratepayer category effectively excluded lodgers or adult children living at home. Both lodgers and adult children living at home tended to be Catholics due to their lower overall economic status and larger families; thus, Catholic franchise was restricted. People in the second category, that is, owners of commercial property, were allowed to nominate special voters for each £10 of value of their property, up to a maximum of six voters (Darby 1976, 50). Since over 90 per cent of the commercial property in Northern Ireland was Protestant owned, this provision expanded their voting franchise and, along with the ratepayer category, extended Unionist control over the ballot box and the government.

These types of discrimination were so blatant that the Cameron Commission investigation of 1968 issued a report critical of the local electoral system. The Commission reported that in Derry, while Catholics made up over 60 per cent of the electorate, due to the districting system, they won only 40 per cent of the County Borough seats (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 30). This is only one example among many in which the gerrymandering of districts produced Unionist majorities on local councils in communities that were predominantly Catholic.

Acts ostensibly aimed at increasing security but used to intimidate and discriminate against Catholics were utilised by the Unionist parliament at Stormont to ensure Protestant control of Northern Ireland. The most prominent of these was the Special Powers Act of 1922, which was implemented to stem the tide of Nationalist violence by splinter groups of the IRA who did not accept the terms of Partition. Although most of the secessionist violence ceased by 1927, the Special Powers Act remained in force until it was repealed by the British government in 1973, well after the beginning of the Troubles. Under the Act, government forces were given a considerable latitude in their conduct towards suspected individuals and broad
powers of search and seizure. The Act permitted actions such as Internment without trial for unspecified periods of time, search and seizures without a warrant, and powers of censorship. The most interesting feature of the Special Powers Act was its clause that "if any person does any act of such nature as to be prejudicial to the preservation of the peace or maintenance of order in Northern Ireland and not specifically provided for in the regulations, he shall be deemed to be guilty of an offence against the regulations" (Darby 1976, 56). Thus, if the police suspected an individual of not preserving the peace or maintaining order, they could detain the individual for an indefinite period of time without charges or a trial.

The Special Powers Act was enforced by the police force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and its paramilitary reservists, the Ulster Special Constabulary. The RUC was unique at that time in that, unlike their British counterparts, its officers were required to carry arms and trained with heavy weapons in military tactics. The RUC also differed from the British police in that it was centrally controlled by the RUC Inspector General and the Northern Ireland Ministry of Home Affairs. Although the 3,000-man force (later raised to 3,400) was legally required to reserve one-third of its spots for Catholics, the number of Catholics never reached higher than 12 per cent of the force. The small number of Catholics on the force is more reflective of the perception in the Catholic community that the RUC was a partisan force that bowed to political pressure than of discriminatory hiring practices. Numerous incidents of the RUC facing off with Catholic demonstrators while ignoring violence from Protestant corners testify to the differential treatment accorded the two communities (Darby 1976, 59).

In addition to the RUC, the government of Northern Ireland created the Ulster Special Constabulary in 1920 to combat IRA secessionist fighters, who were opposed to Partition. The Ulster Special Constabulary was divided into three corps: the A, B, and C Specials. The A and C Specials disbanded after Partition-related violence subsided, but the 'B Specials' survived until their group was disbanded by the British government at the beginning of Direct Rule by the British in 1972. Membership in the B Specials ranged from a maximum of 25,000 people to a minimum of just over 8,000 in 1969. The B Specials were usually several times larger in number than the police force and, given the task of combating potential subversion of the state, they were recruited as an exclusively Protestant paramilitary force. There were open ties between the B Specials the Orange Order and also with illegal Protestant paramilitary forces such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). Many members of the B Specials were also members in the latter forces, and the units of the B Specials often used Orange Order lodges for training exercises and practice drills (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 37). The B Specials engaged in activities such as manning roadblocks and protecting selected installations during times of suspected IRA activity. Due to the large number of Protestant extremists in their ranks, the B Specials gained notoriety for their use of violence in the execution of their duties; offences included beatings, harassment, and body searches of Catholics at checkpoints. Some of the victims were known to the B Specials as neighbours, but were nonetheless subjected to harsh treatments, unlike Protestants who were merely waived through (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 38). The B Specials came to be universally loathed by the Catholic community as a tool of Protestant repression and intimidation as a result of these and other well-published incidents.

It has been well established that the police forces of Northern Ireland acted in collusion with Unionist political forces in the systematic discrimination and repression of Catholics. Several British-sponsored and independent commissions investigated allegations of discrimination against Catholics, publishing reports that universally condemned police actions; however, these reports usually produced little change in the situation. These reports, most of which were published in the 1960s (including the Report of the Cameron Commission, the Scarman and Hunt Reports, and investigations by James Callaghan and Max Hastings), were critical of the RUC and the B Specials, noting the poor leadership and lack of discipline of the B Specials; the lack of protection for Catholic areas; and the paramilitary character of the RUC, which increased the alienation of the Catholic community (Darby 1976, 62). While these reports, issued at the beginning of the Troubles, spurred some action towards reforms, they appeared far too late in the process to avert the impending crisis. By that time, even the disbanding of the B Specials and the attempted conversion of the RUC into a community-based police force did little to assuage Catholic demands, which had risen as their communal mistrust of the
Protestant control of the judicial system and the courts was also maintained by Unionist control of the government of Northern Ireland. In the judicial system, Protestants outnumbered Catholics by sixty-eight to six in 1968. Fifteen out of twenty-eight appointees to the high court of Northern Ireland between 1921 and 1972 were either current or former members of the Unionist political party, strengthening the link between political control and judicial control (Darby 1976, 64).

Jury selection was also biased in favour of the Protestant community. Since potential jurors were selected from the voting roles, only ratepayers, who were predominantly Protestant, could be selected to serve on juries. This practice generally excluded Catholic participation in the court system, unless of course they participated as defendants. Surprisingly enough, evidence shows that sentencing among Catholics and Protestants was fairly even-handed. The judicial system, however, did not incarcerate the same number of people from each of the two communities. Discrimination within the judicial system stemmed from the severity of charges lodged against defendants by the police system. For example, charges against Protestant defendants were often reduced or dropped, while Catholics were usually confronted with the full force of the law.

Other areas of Protestant domination included the public sector areas of employment, housing allocations, and educational revenues, where discrimination was more often the rule than the exception. These areas, along with private-sector employment and investment, are addressed in further detail in the following section on economic participation. In general, though, the political balance in Northern Ireland was weighted in favour of the Protestant community from its inception. The political power of the Catholics began to increase after the beginning of the violence, but still remains in contention today, due in large part to the indifference of Westminster and the willingness of the Unionists to use any means at their disposal to ensure their continued Protestant dominance. The following sections address the economic conditions and the shift in fortunes that precipitated the Catholic civil rights movement, which subsequently resulted in a violent response by the Protestants, signalling the beginning of thirty years of conflict.

Economic Participation

Control of the national and most local governments also gave the Unionist majority the power to determine Protestant and Catholic share of public sector benefits. In Northern Ireland, the construction of public housing has been regulated by the Unionist-controlled parliament and local councils. Subsidised housing was controlled by Local Housing Authorities (LHAs) that were appointed by the elected councils. The gerrymandering of districts effectively gave the Unionists control over the selection of LHA members. Generally,Unionist-controlled councils used their power to deny housing to Catholics, and occasionally Protestants, if the councils thought that Catholics could demand equal housing in the same districts. The main reason behind a council's willingness to deny housing to Protestants was to ensure Protestant political domination in those districts where their electoral majority was slim (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 31). By denying housing to Protestants in districts in which they feared Catholics would also demand housing, the councils effectively limited the number of Catholic ratepayers, ensuring Protestant electoral majorities. In addition, Unionist-controlled LHAs tended to build standard three-bedroom units, without regard to larger-sized Catholic families. Incidents have also been reported in which Unionist LHAs granting subsidised housing to bachelors or to married couples without children even though there were large, Catholic families who were desperately in need of housing (Compton 1991, 37). In the County of Fermanagh, despite the fact that they constituted a majority (albeit a slim one) of the population, Catholics were awarded only one-third of the 1,500 housing units built in the post-war period (Whyte 1980, 19).

There are, however, indicators that abuse of this system ran both ways; that is, the few Nationalist-controlled councils practised discrimination as effectively as did the Unionist-controlled councils. Overall, due to the larger number of poor Catholics, the proportion of Catholics in public housing was slightly higher than Protestants. That there was a greater proportion of Catholics receiving public housing does not necessarily indicate a lack of discrimination in this area; but, the higher proportion of Catholics living in poverty points to employment and access to wealth as key areas...
Catholic employment in the public sector (aside from the police and judiciary) averaged at about 30 per cent, a figure almost proportional to their percentage of the overall population. A closer look, however, proves that these statistics are misleading. While Catholics made up about 40 per cent of manual labourers, they held only 11 per cent of senior positions in 1951. This figure shrank to 6 per cent by 1959, but began to rise subsequent to reforms which followed the outbreak of violence, reaching almost 15 per cent by 1973 (Whyte 1980, 9). The Cameron Commission thoroughly investigated Local Authority employment and found that Unionist councils had used their power to discriminate against Catholics in the hiring process (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 32).

In the private sector, two main categories of imbalance existed between Catholics and Protestants: the level of unemployment and the type of employment. Catholic employment tended toward the lower end of the job market. Catholics were employed predominantly in unskilled and lower-paying jobs, such as clothing manufacture and textiles. Protestants, on the other hand, dominated the relatively higher-paid areas of shipbuilding and engineering. As illustrated in figure 2, the more an industry paid (and the more regular the work) the fewer Catholics it tended to employ, while the lower-paid and less regular positions (like seasonal building work) employed Catholics at a rate close to their demographic representation.

In each profession, Catholics tended to occupy the lower ranks. Thus, in white-collar sectors, Catholics would be far more likely to have clerical than managerial positions, mirroring their distribution in the public sector (Whyte 1980, 15). Catholics also tended to work in industries (e.g., construction) that were more sensitive to economic downturns and, therefore, more likely to layoff workers during periods of economic recession.

In addition to discrimination in hiring practices, several other factors account for this disparity between employment in the two communities, including policies that affected the location of new industries through zoning and tax incentives and those that encouraged placement of industries in areas difficult or dangerous for Catholics to reach. Discrimination was also sanctioned and promoted by officials. For example, Sir Basil Brooke, who served as Northern Ireland's prime minister for twenty years, actively promoted a system of employment wherein jobs were offered through social organisations such as the Orange Order. In the Londonderry Sentinel (20 March 1934), Sir Brooke stated that:

I recommend those people who are Loyalists not to employ Roman Catholics, 99 per cent of whom are disloyal; I want you to remember one point in regard to the employment of people who are disloyal....You are disenfranchising yourselves in that way....You people who are employers have the ball at your feet. If you don't act properly now before we know where we are we shall find ourselves in the minority instead of the majority. (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 33)

In addition, trade unions often acted as employment representatives; thus, since the unions were sectarian in nature, Catholics were effectively banned from employment in many instances. When word spread among the Catholic community that a company would hire only Protestants, most often Catholics would simply stop applying.

The segregation and imbalance of the educational system also affected Catholic employment opportunities. Religion and education in Northern Ireland have been linked for almost the entirety of Irish history and remain so today. Due to persecution after the victory of William of Orange, Catholics have been deeply suspicious of state involvement in education and have fought to retain church control of their own schools. Likewise, the Protestant community has argued against the secularisation of the educational system, successfully defeating proposals that were suggested immediately following Partition to integrate the school system and place religious education on a voluntary after-school basis.
The result was an educational system that allowed bible teaching of predominantly Protestant ethics and the withdrawal of Catholics to religious schools that received funding equal to only 65 per cent of that given to the state-sector, Protestant-affiliated schools (Darby 1976, 128).

Onset of Conflict

The patterns that signalled changes in Northern Ireland’s peace and stability took place over more than a decade. Beginning with changes in the economic outlook following the recession of the 1950s, Catholics in Northern Ireland experienced a rise in economic fortunes (albeit smaller than their Protestant neighbours) as a result of stimulus programs instituted by Stormont and Westminster. These changes generated a rise in Catholic awareness of their political shortcomings, creating the perception of relative deprivation. Demonstrations for redress interacted with a culturally-generated fear of extinction (fanned by extremists on both sides) on the part of Protestants, creating the spark which set all of Northern Ireland ablaze for more than twenty-five years. This section examines (1) the shift in economic fortunes between the 1950s and 1960s, (2) the rise of relative deprivation and its manifestation in the civil rights movements in Northern Ireland from the mid to late 1960s, (3) the source and meaning of the Protestant fear of extinction, and (4) the dialectical cycle of demonstrations and violence that culminated in the Troubles of the early 1970s.

Changing Fortunes

Although unemployment in Catholic sectors has always been higher than in the Protestant community, several changes that benefited both communities in Northern Ireland were brought about by modernisation programs initiated in the late 1950s and early 1960s. In the early 1950s demand in areas such as shipbuilding and textile manufacturing began to decline, as the United Kingdom moved from war production to rebuilding Great Britain’s economy. Between 1951 and 1954, linen production in Northern Ireland fell 15 percent, causing a corresponding increase in unemployment. Shipbuilding and agriculture also experienced sharp declines, as other nations began to realise their own post-war recoveries. Since shipbuilding, textiles, and engineering represented almost 50 per cent of the manufacturing jobs in Northern Ireland, the effects of the slowdowns were devastating to the province’s economy (Bew et al. 1979, 133). Unemployment jumped by over 40,000 jobs, offsetting gains in the public and service sectors over the same period. Figures show that unemployment in Northern Ireland at this time was more than twice that of the rest of the UK, hovering between 5 per cent and 7.5 per cent (Bew et al. 1979, 135).

Vocal demands from both communities for Stormont to address the problem resulted in the government’s grudging willingness to implement a series of welfare state programs similar to those in effect in Great Britain. Massive increases in medical services and educational expenditures were coupled with incentives to attract foreign capital investment to the province. The implementation of the programs and services reduced disparities between the two communities, although full equality was not achieved (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 79).

In the fields of health care and education, massive grants enabled medical workers and teachers to be hired on a larger scale than before, and improvements in facilities and training increased both Catholic access to these services and employment in these fields. Catholic schools experienced a sharp rise in standards of education, with government funding improving both the facilities and the quality of Catholic teachers. By the mid to late 1960s teaching facilities for Catholic students, including the number of schools and the student-teacher ratio, were rapidly approaching the quality of the Protestant-dominated state educational system (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 73).

While private employment did not favour Catholics to the extent that the public sector did, Catholics experienced increased opportunities in private employment as well. The formation of a Northern Ireland Development Council in 1955 speeded the implementation of policies to jump start industrial production. By the mid-1960s, 230 new firms had been established, and 200 others had expanded. Companies from Great Britain, the United States, and continental Europe were lured to Northern Ireland with generous tax incentives and low land prices. The number of foreign
multinational companies in Northern Ireland climbed from seven in 1958 to twenty-seven in 1968 (most of which employed more than 500 people) and resulted in over 22,000 new manufacturing jobs (Teague 1987, 164). Even though many of these new branch plants were established in areas dominated by Protestant communities, the background of the owners of the plants and their lack of direct connection to the conflict meant that their hiring practices were less discriminatory. This was especially true in the areas of semi-skilled labour, where larger numbers of Catholics and women were employed by the new multinational plants (Wichert 1991, 89).

The Rise of NICRA and Civil Rights

The rise in employment in Northern Ireland during this time was certainly not remarkable in the overall scheme of the province's economic fortunes, nor did the Catholic community benefit out of proportion to its size. On a case by case basis, it is not possible to determine that the practices of individual multinationals were overall less discriminatory than the previous regime. Some companies implemented non-sectarian hiring practices, while others employed the existing Unionist-dominated hiring systems. One major difference, however, was a change in perception on the part of the Catholic community. With advances in some areas of employment (particularly following the recession of the 1950s) and increased educational opportunities available to Catholic children, members of the Catholic community began to believe seriously in the possibility of an improved future (Wichert 1991, 81-2).

Inspired by the civil rights movements in the United States and elsewhere, in the late 1960s groups of Catholics and liberal Protestants gathered together to form the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). NICRA set out to right wrongs through the dissemination of information, street protests, and later the use of civil disobedience campaigns aimed at changing the discriminatory practices and policies of the Unionist government. Centred around equalising the political and continued economic disparity between Catholics and Protestants, NICRA's demands called for universal suffrage; the repeal of the Special Powers Act; the disbanding of the B Specials; the re-drawing of electoral boundaries; and the imposition of laws designed to end discrimination in public employment and public housing (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 39). NICRA, unlike the IRA and its disciples, had decided to take a stake in the existing political formation and was demanding certain changes so that their participation could proceed on an equal and fair level. Rather than attacking the legitimacy of the state or opting out, members of NICRA saw their future as part of Northern Ireland's state, and they were therefore willing to take steps to integrate more fully into the existing system.

Fears of the Protestant Community

The fear of extinction is generated out of a perception of threat to Cultural Identity, with past perceptions being projected onto current events. In the case of the Protestants in Northern Ireland, historical incidents of violence and massacre have been mythologised and used as the template for understanding modern Protestant-Catholic relations. One event that has coloured perceptions of Protestant / Catholic relations was the massacres of Protestants that took place during the Catholic uprising of 1641. During this uprising Irish rebels in Ulster killed and expelled several thousand Protestant settlers (Bardon 1992, 138). This event, particularly the massacre of eighty Protestant men, women and children at Portadown, has repeatedly been used by Protestants (most notably the Reverend Ian Paisley) in making comparisons between Catholic behaviour at that time and the contemporary actions of the IRA (Crighton and Mac Iver 1991, 129). Although it seems improbable, fear of extinction is quite real in the minds of Protestants who not only do not want to lose their position in society, but fear a cultural 'genocide' if they are forced into a union with the Republic of Ireland to the south. Shortly after the Act of Union was passed by Westminster in 1800, Irish extremists staged several unsuccessful revolts. The bloodiest of these was called the Tithe War and was fought because Catholics did not want to pay legally-owed tithes to the Protestant Anglican Church of Ireland. The result was the conversion of tithes into rent in 1838, severing the direct connection to the church and easing the sectarian tension for a time. The third reminder of violence between the two communities took place between Irish Nationalists and British authorities between 1919 and 1922. Sparked
by the 'Easter Rebellion' of April 1916, Sinn Féin members and a nascent IRA instigated attacks on the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC), the Auxiliaries and later the infamous 'Black and Tans', resulting in an ugly war of attack and reprisal, which killed hundreds (Macardle 1968, 314-5). It was during this uprising and subsequent civil war that the British passed the Act of Partition and set up Home Rule for the Irish Free State and Northern Ireland. By the mid-1920s the pro-treaty forces had won the bitter civil war and Northern Ireland had been created as a Protestant enclave (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 26).

Among the issues that contributed the most to Protestant insecurity and their fear of extinction in Northern Ireland were the 3.2 million Catholics who lived south of the border and their link (through the Roman Catholic Church) to Catholics in continental Europe and the Vatican in Rome. Within Northern Ireland itself Protestants make up about 58 per cent of the population of 1.6 million people, but if united with the south, then the Protestants would move from being a majority to a minority, subject (they fear) to the will of the Catholics. (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 17).

The fear of extinction manifested itself as fear of the Republic of Ireland's constitutional ban on abortion (although recent changes will allow women to leave the country for an abortion) and the difficulty of obtaining legal divorces. Another target of Protestant fears was the special status of the Roman Catholic Church in the republic's constitution, which was not changed until the passage of a referendum in 1973. The twin fears of Catholic violence and Catholic domination have become a part of the Cultural Identity of Protestants in Northern Ireland, lying below the surface and waiting for events (or individuals) to bring them into full bloom, which is precisely what happened when activists with NICRA began their public demonstrations in 1968.

The Cycle of Violence: Onward to the Troubles

By the mid-1960s there were several movements to expand Catholic awareness and participation in Northern Ireland's politics. Foremost among them was NICRA, but others (including the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), the Campaign for Social Justice, and the People's Democracy) were all advocating the return of Catholics to the ballot box and the revamping of Northern Ireland's legal structure to provide more equality for Catholics (Crighton and Mac Iver 1991, 135). Furthermore, Northern Ireland's Prime Minister, Terence O'Neill, had launched a mostly symbolic campaign to enlist Catholic support for the Unionist Party. During his tenure in office (1963-69) he attempted to move toward greater accommodation with the Catholic community by offering limited reforms that were primarily economic in nature (though some were political reforms). These reforms, while not enough for most of the Catholic community, did result in the Catholic Nationalist Party ending its twenty-five-year boycott of Stormont in 1965 (Crighton and Mac Iver 1991, 134).

The dominant Unionist Party in Northern Ireland was not sufficiently separated from its Protestant support base to safely seek to bridge the gap between Catholics and Protestants by offering economic and political reforms. This can be seen in the harsh rhetoric and reprisals from hard-liners in the Protestant community. One such hard-liner, the Protestant fundamentalist leader Ian Paisley, stated that O'Neill was selling the Protestants down the river with his reform campaigns (Crighton and Mac Iver 1991, 135). By using the threats of O'Neill's reforms; NICRA's actions (which Paisley thought was merely a cover for the IRA); and the SDLP's call for an Irish dimension to Northern Ireland's politics, the Protestant fundamentalists fragmented the Unionist front through their creation of the hard-line Democratic Unionist Party in 1971.

The violence itself began in 1968 at the beginning of NICRA's campaign of peaceful demonstrations to enlist the support of the Catholic community. Their first march, from Coalisland to Dungannon, took place peacefully in March 1968, but the second march in Derry was violently broken up by the RUC and the B Specials (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 39). Three months later the more radical student group, the People's Democracy, staged another peaceful march from Belfast to Derry. Police and Unionist crowds both attacked the marchers outside of Derry and within the city itself. The Cameron Commission investigation of these outbreaks of violence established (par. 40) "that on the night of 4/5 January a number of
policemen were guilty of misconduct which involved assault and battery, malicious
damage to property in the streets in the predominantly Catholic Bogside area...and
the use of provocative, sectarian and political slogans" (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988,
171; Cameron Report, paragraphs 97-101 and 177).

By the summer of 1969 increasing violence between the Unionist demonstrators
(and police) and the Catholics (and a rejuvenated IRA) led to the intervention of the
British government, in the form of the military. The main incident was the annual
Protestant Apprentice Boys of Derry parade, which marched through the city and
around the city walls and close to the Catholic Bogside area. Instead of the usual
stony looks and silence from the Catholic community, stones, petrol-bombs, and
barricades met the marchers. After two days of fighting between the Catholics and
police, the British Army was finally called in to separate the combatants. Between
1969 and 1971, the British government tried to introduce a number of reforms
including many that had been demanded by NICRA and the SDLP. These included
universal suffrage; the re-drawing of electoral districts; the disbanding of the B
Specials; and the establishment of a new housing executive to handle distribution of
public housing through an objective needs-based system. These reforms, however,
were only partially implemented and (by that time) were not enough to satisfy the
demands of the increasingly polarised Catholic community. For example, even
though the B Specials were disbanded and the RUC disarmed, many of their
members were allowed to enlist in the new Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR)
attached to the British Army (Rowthorn and Wayne 1988, 41). This only served to
strain the relationship between the Catholic community and the Army, which was
increasingly seen less as saviours and more as oppressors as time passed without
significant lessening in violence.

The final straw, which escalated the violence to an insurgency, was the 1971
introduction of Internment without trial by the government of Northern Ireland. Using
legislation from the Special Powers Act, Stormont introduced interment in August of
1971, with 342 men picked up in the first dawn raids. Since the British Army was
instructed to carry out the Internment raids, they then became the focus of Catholic
anger and demonstrations. The most famous of these anti-Internment
demonstrations resulted in the Bloody Sunday killings in Derry in January 1972,
when British soldiers fired into the Catholic crowd, killing thirteen people (Rowthorn
and Wayne 1988, 42). By March of that year, the British government had dissolved
Stormont (to rule directly from Westminster), Internment was in full swing with the
implementation of the 'Diplock Courts', and the IRA had reconstituted itself fully by
providing defence from police and Protestant paramilitaries to Catholic areas. The
Troubles, which have lasted thirty years to date - resulting in thousands of deaths
and millions of Pounds of damage - moved on that fateful morning from small-scale
clashes to a full-blown sectarian conflict. At the time of this work, tensions between
Unionist and Nationalist, Irish and British, Protestant and Catholic continue to run
high. Regardless of the optimism generated by the recently signed Good Friday
agreement mistrust between the two communities remains high and a host of
difficult issues - such as the routing of Loyalist parades - continue challenge leaders
and ordinary residents on all sides. One can only hope that this agreement, unlike
many that preceded it, can provide the basis for better understanding and a lasting
peace between the two communities.

Footnote

1 For ease of use, this paper will subsequently use the common term Derry for the
city of Londonderry / Derry.

References

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CAIN contains information and source material on the conflict and politics in Northern Ireland. CAIN is based within Ulster University.

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