

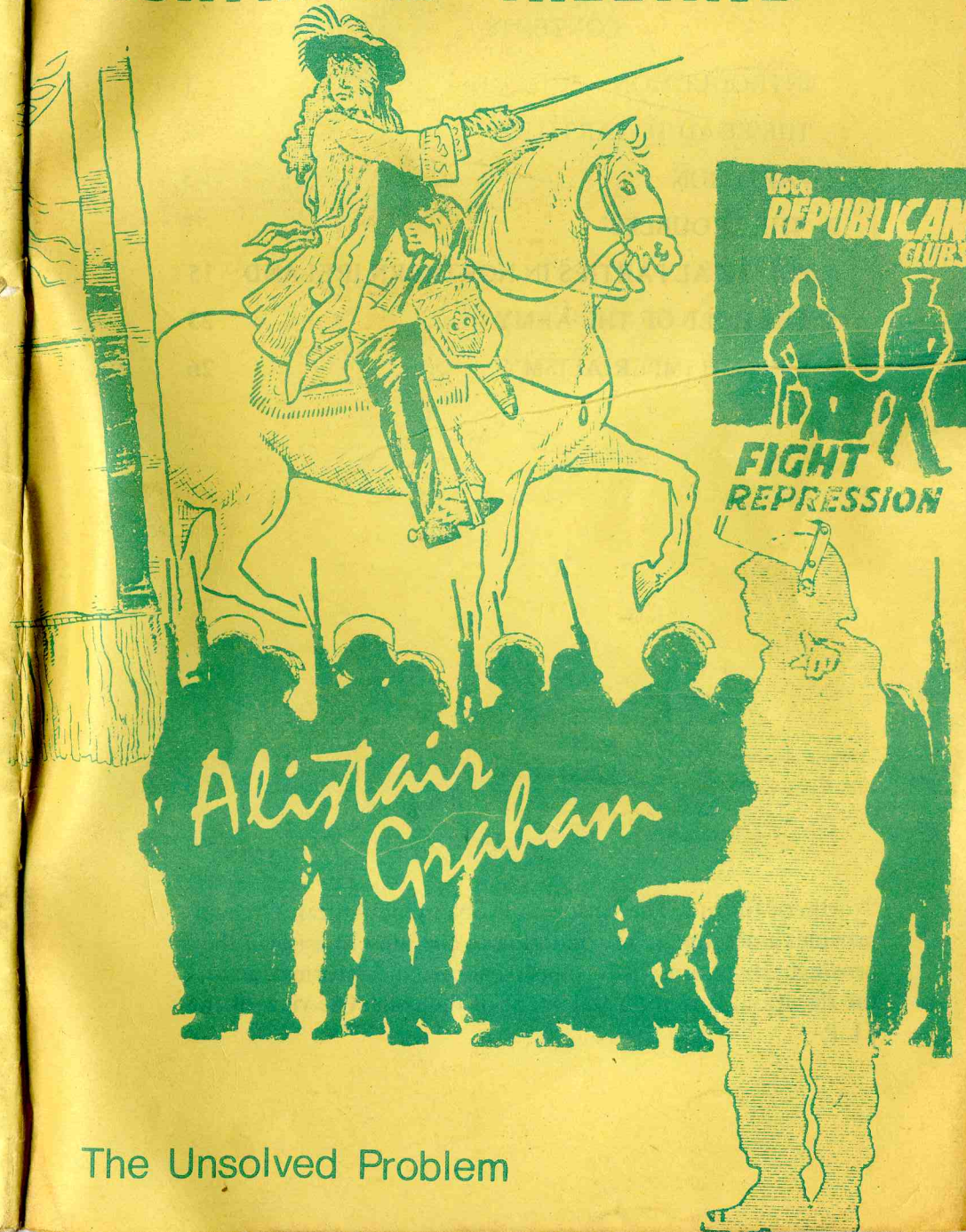
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NORTHERN IRELAND



The Unsolved Problem

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'Northern Ireland, The Unsolved Problem' by Alistair Graham provides a descriptive introduction to the present crisis in the province. Its purpose is to supply background information on the situation. It is not a statement of the collective view of the I.L.P.

NORTHERN IRELAND THE UNSOLVED PROBLEM

by

ALISTAIR GRAHAM

From Civil Rights to Sectarianism

INTRODUCTION

This pamphlet is by no means intended as a policy statement on Northern Ireland. Neither does it attempt to present an instant solution. It was written to give background information to the present situation in the North, together with an attempt at some analysis.

However, it is hoped that any views expressed in it will be shared by many on the left who wish for a peaceful, and progressive, solution to the conflict; and that it will help towards an understanding of the complexity of the problem. There are no clear-cut answers to what has been happening in Northern Ireland. Confused or simplistic analysis is no less wrong when it is cloaked in Marxist jargon.

Over the past few years, the media has ensured that the streets and homes of Northern Irish working class people have become familiar to the majority of people in this country. The Falls, Shankhill Road, Ardoyne, and Andersonstown in Belfast, together with the Bogside in Derry, are names that emerge with deadening regularity in newspaper columns and television newsreels. But the reality of people's lives somehow gets obscured behind the media treatment. For years now, violence has led to a constant decline in social conditions. Families have been bombed or beaten out of their homes, there have been shifts in population; and armed troops on the streets are a daily reminder of how far normality has been twisted into a grotesque parody.

Any examination of Northern Ireland today will tend to pessimism. This one is no exception. But, for a start, we should concede that the people of Northern Ireland are entitled to the same social expectations as people in Britain; to jobs, housing, educational opportunity and the right to associate freely. Such considerations should come first, before either any glib talk of the 'revolutionary implications' or the struggle, or before we turn our back on a situation for which Britain bears some responsibility.

A.G.

1. THE ROAD TO PARTITION

Ireland's troubles are linked directly with Ireland's past. That Ireland is caught up in the web of its own history is a truism that is often repeated. In order to understand what is happening in Northern Ireland today, it is essential to have some knowledge of the past – the conquest of Ireland, the Anglo-Scottish settlement of Ulster, the establishment of the Orange Order, and the events leading up to partition.

These events are part of Ireland's heritage. To know the details, however, does not necessarily help to provide a solution. History is open to many different interpretations – and Irish history more than most. Indeed, the different communities in the Six Counties grow up with completely different interpretations of their own history. Events from the past are cloaked in a green or orange hue: Orangemen march in memory of the Battle of the Boyne, whilst republicans rally to commemorate the Easter uprising. Derry's Walls or Dublin's Post Office have a different significance according to which community one grew up in.

However, a brief summary of relevant events is necessary, in order to put the present into perspective. When Lloyd George was negotiating the Treaty that established the Free State in 1921, it is reported that he emerged from a fortnight's hard debate with Irish delegates to be faced by newspaper reporters. 'How far have you got, Prime Minister?' they asked. 'As far as Brian Boru and the Battle of Clontarf' was the reply.

This summary will not go back that far – merely to the union of Ireland with England, on January 1, 1801, which abolished the Irish Parliament. This was a direct response to the rebellion of the 'United Irishmen' in 1798, when disenfranchised Catholics and Presbyterians united against the Anglican establishment. The Orange Order (established 1795) was used successfully as a weapons against the 'United Irishmen'. It was later to become a potent influence, particularly in the northern counties.

The Nineteenth Century was, of course, the period during which the Industrial Revolution transformed the face of Britain. It transformed the largely Protestant areas around Belfast, too, providing a flourishing industrial base in the shipyards, linen mills, and in ancillary engineering. But the rest of Ireland remained largely unaffected. It retained a peasant culture, suffering dramatically from the effects of the famine of 1845-47, and of mass migration. The power base throughout Ireland remained unchanged, too, though industrialism in the north acted to encourage religious differences.

Resistance and revolt continued throughout the Century. The uprising by the United Irishmen in 1798 was followed by the 1848 rebellion of 'Young Ireland' and the Irish Confederation, and the Fenian struggle of 1867 onwards. It helped to forge a heritage which stamped the mark of physical force deeply on Irish politics.

The Orange Card

When Gladstone introduced his Home Rule Bill following the General Election of 1885 (which saw the return of 85 Irish Nationalist M.P.s, headed by Parnell, to Westminster), the Conservatives decided to oppose the Bill by all means in their power. In anticipation of the Bill, Lord Randolph Churchill wrote that 'the Orange Card would be the one to play.' Churchill wrote to Salisbury (the Tory leader); "If... Gladstone introduced a Home Rule Bill, I should not hesitate to agitate Ulster even to resistance beyond constitutional means."

Gladstone's attempts to introduce Home Rule were defeated. Meanwhile, in Ireland, leadership of the presbyterian church had passed from Liberal to Tory hands in 1829, and presbyterians were allowed into the Orange Order – previously an exclusive Anglican organization – in 1834. Thus the landlord class (for the industrialists remained a comparatively weak political influence) confirmed their power with a policy of divide and rule.

Britain entered the Twentieth Century, and under Asquith, the

Liberals once again introduced a Home Rule Bill. Once again, the 'Orange Card' was played by the Tory opposition. Sir Edward Carson and other leading Tories threw themselves into the task of organizing opposition throughout the North of Ireland. The Ulster Volunteers drilled and marched – whilst in the South, the Irish Volunteers were formed as a counter-force.

In 1914 came the First World War, and the Home Rule Bill was shelved for the duration. But in Ireland, new forces were stirring. There was the so-called 'Gaelic revival'. Sinn Fein had been formed by Arthur Griffith in 1905 and complete independence from England was being urged. A rising was planned by republican groups centred on the Irish Republican Brotherhood and Connolly's Citizens' Army, for 1916.

The rising misfired. However, in Dublin, on Easter Monday, 1916, the Irish Republic was declared, and the volunteers took to the streets. But after a week of bloody fighting those leading the insurrection surrendered. Sixteen of its leaders were executed, including Pearse and Connolly.

Yeats was to declare lyrically that 'a terrible beauty was born' and, prophetically, "There's nothing but our own red blood can make a right rose tree." on Easter, 1916 - and certainly, the events developed an important symbolic quality. But at the time it was the mass executions, demanded by Tory members of the Cabinet like Birkenhead and Joynson-Hicks, rather than the rising itself, which stirred Irish people. It gave an impetus to Sinn Fein; and in the 1918 General Election, Sinn Fein won 73 of the 105 Irish seats (26 Unionists and 6 Nationalists were also elected). They refused to take their seats in Westminster, but instead convened the Dail Eireann in Dublin – which was promptly disbanded by the British authorities.

From 1919 to 1921, there followed the struggle between the British Army and the Irish Republican Army (IRA). It was a vicious conflict, in which the notorious 'Black and Tans' stamped their mark on history, and which led to the partition of Ireland in 1921.

2. PARTITION

In 1920, the Government of Ireland Act established the Stormont Government in Belfast. The six-county regime was confirmed by the Boundary Commission in 1925. In 1921 came the treaty which established a 26-county Irish Free State (opposed by the IRA, in a civil war which ended in 1923).

The boundaries imposed by Lloyd George enabled the Unionists to exert complete control in the North. Northern Ireland maintained a Unionist Government in power from the time of its establishment right up to the imposition of direct rule in 1972; and during much of that time, the Nationalist opposition boycotted the Stormont Parliament. The first Stormont Prime Minister, Lord Craigavon, declared '.....we are a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant State.' A later Prime Minister, Basil Brooke, said: 'I have not a Roman Catholic about my own place I would appeal to Loyalists therefore, wherever possible, to employ good Protestant lads and lassies.'

It was on such officially-endorsed sentiments as these (backed by a largely Protestant police force, and the notorious Special Powers Act) that the vicious system of discrimination in Northern Ireland was maintained.

The nature of the discrimination which existed in Northern Ireland was described in an article by Robin Jenkins which appeared in the 'Socialist Leader' on June 25, 1966 (three years before the present 'troubles' erupted). Robin Jenkins had been engaged in research in Northern Ireland on behalf of the Peace Research Centre.

"About 33 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland is Catholic and in many of the towns near the Eire border there

there is a majority of Catholics. Yet in almost all of these places, the Unionists manage to keep power by gerrymandering the electoral boundaries.... In one town that we visited, Dungannon, 53 per cent of the population is Catholic, but there are 14 Unionists and seven Catholics on the Town Council, and this pattern will never change so long as the electoral boundaries stay as they are now.

"Since the war, Dungannon Council has built 194 houses and let every one of them to Protestants.....

"It is not just the law and the electoral system that discriminates against Catholics. They have no hope of getting any of the top jobs in Ulster. Some firms refuse to employ Catholics and others will employ them to do menial tasks only Some towns have had 25 per cent unemployment since the war.

"In areas controlled by Catholics, there appears to be a national policy not to develop them but to let them slowly disintegrate. Newry is such a town High unemployment, bad slum housing, high incidence of mental illness and none of the amenities that one would normally expect in a town of this size. It is rather like one imagines Sunderland or Jarrow to have been in 1930.

"....There has been a gradual partition of the two communities until now there are fewer mixed areas than there were fifty years ago. This segregation and apartheid is continuing on most of the council estates."

Change

But social change has affected Northern Ireland as it has elsewhere. The decline in traditional industries, and the need to encourage new employment has affected the political fabric as well as the industrial. The new industries were based on international capital, and had no interest in maintaining Ulster's traditions of sectarianism. Much of the new investment in Northern Ireland is from British or American firms, attracted by cheap labour and attractive investment grants, etc., though industry has been encouraged from West Germany and other countries in Europe.

All this has helped to 'open up' areas of Northern Ireland to outside influences, and to raise the aspirations of sections of the local bourgeoisie. It was partially (though not entirely) this which encouraged the growth of groups like the Civil Rights Association and People's Democracy in the 'sixties – both of which had articulate middle class

backing.

Under the more urbane rule of Prime Minister O'Neill, the Nationalist opposition was encouraged to take part in the Stormont Parliament once again. O'Neill even went so far as to meet with the Irish Republic's Prime Minister, Sean Lemass.

3. 'THE TROUBLES'

The crisis came in 1968-69, with the ambush of a Civil Rights march by Protestant extremists at Burntollet Bridge, the fighting in the Bogside area of Derry which followed, and the decision to commit British troops to Northern Ireland, in August 1969, to 'keep the peace'.

It needs emphasising here that the first time that British troops went into action in Derry it was to stop the Ulster police and the 'B Specials' from entering the Bogside Later, under a Tory Government, they were to escort the police into the Bogside!

It is worth quoting media reports of the time, together with those covering later episodes, as the passage of events has led many into a state of amnesia. Too many, indeed, appear to have forgotten completely what it was all about.

Teargas was used for the first time by police in the United Kingdom in the Bogside district of Derry in 1969. It happened during disturbances which followed the annual Apprentice Boy's march in the city, when the R.U.C. used it against the Catholic Bogside.

When the 'B Specials' were brought in, British troops took up position between them and the barricades of the Bogside. 'The escalation had ceased, and for the time being the situation was stable,' declared 'New Society', in an article published on August 21, 1969.

The 'New Society' article (entitled 'Bogside Off Its Knees', by John Bayley and Peter Loizos) continued 'it is most unlikely that the Derry situation will return to "normal" merely because troops arrived. First, the Bogside are extremely afraid of reprisals from the police, in the form of imprisonment under the Special Powers Act. They have memories of the reprisals of 1921 the leadership is united in wanting to keep the community free from all control by the Stormont government. This is not a republican move, but a goal dictated by fear and the determination that the system must be changed in favour of the Catholic minority. At the moment the Bogside feel that the police and the B Specials must be kept out not just for the moment, but for good.'

'They were to be kept out for nearly three years – until the end of July 1972, when 'Operation Motorman' was mounted to end the so-called 'no-go' areas. The Army cleared the way into the Bogside – the police followed. The 'Sunday Times' reported:

'It was on Monday afternoon that the RUC sent their first mobile patrol up William Street, where the police had clashed violently with the Bogside in the hot summer of 1969. One on foot followed. The constables were reported whistling and striking the "thumbs under armpits" pose which the Bogside recognise only too well. Eddie McAteer, the Nationalist Party leader who lives in the heart of the Bogside, was tempted to comment: "What did they think they were doing – whistling up the ghosts?"' (Sunday Times, August 6, 1972).

But much had happened between 1969 and 1972. A situation which many thought, in 1969, could be cured by the presence of a non-sectarian peace-keeping force (the British Army), together with some much needed reforms, rapidly went sour. A change of policy, following the Tory victory of 1970, and the arrival of Regionald Maudling at the Home Office, helped the process of escalation. By the time 'Operation Motorman' was mounted, the number of British troops in Northern Ireland had risen to 20,000.

Change in Direction

The change in direction was summed up in a document prepared by the North Derry Civil Rights Association in 1971, in which the point was made correctly that the programme outlined by the British Government in 1969 had been received with general favour. It continued: 'It was understood (in August 1969) that the troops on the streets were there primarily to protect the individual citizen with impartiality. Mr. Quintin Hogg (now Lord Hailsham) expressed this admirably at the Conservative Party Conference in Brighton on 8th October 1969 – "It is not possible for British regular forces to be policemen, but these troops are not enforcing law and order – they are keeping the peace, which is not the same thing....."

'The first cause for doubt on the part of the minority community was the failure of the new Conservative government, following the 1970 election, to confirm in the Home Office Mr. Hogg..... Distrust of the military command increased with its unilateral withdrawal of liaison from citizen's groups in minority areas, together with troop deployment in districts, urban and rural, hitherto peaceful. Only at this stage did the operations of Republican militants become significant; support for their activities was (and is) directly related to disillusionment with the British forces.

'On the political front, despair deepened with the visit to Northern Ireland in spring, 1971, of Mr. Reginald Maudling, as British Home Secretary The Army now refers to its role as "action in aid of the civil power" or "upholding lawful authority". The contrast with the words and intentions of Mr. Hogg in 1969 is obvious.'

It was all too clear that a change of policy was being introduced and it was a change that encouraged the growth of such groups as the Provisionals.

In 1968, the IRA was still an insignificant influence on events. It had been shattered by its abortive campaign of the 'fifties, and was only then regrouping. By 1969, it was beginning to make its presence felt, and by the following year the split between the official wing and the Provisional breakaway was confirmed. The implications will be exami-

ned in more detail later on, but the 'physical force' tactics of the Provisionals were undoubtedly given a great impetus by the new 'hard line' adopted by both the U.K. and Stormont governments after June, 1970, as the N. Derry C.R.A. document pointed out.

In Northern Ireland, O'Neill was replaced as Prime Minister by Chichester-Clark. O'Neill was now regarded as 'too soft' by the Unionist hardliners. By now the concepts of peace-keeping and conciliation had been thrown overboard. The Government instead favoured 'tough measures'. The 'rule of law' was to be re-imposed – whatever the cost.

The changing Government attitudes (from Westminster and Stormont) are reflected in the following news snippets from papers over the period:

'DEMAND FOR TOUGHER MEASURES IN ULSTER'

'During an early morning inspection of troops breaking up a riot at the Ballymurphy estate yesterday Mr. Ronald Burroughs, the British Prime Minister's permanent representative at Stormont, said flatly that he was convinced that the rioting was being stirred up by "sinister subversives" purely in the interests of republicanism.

"it has nothing to do with civil rights, social justice or religion".'

(The Guardian, August 6, 1970).

'Mr. Robert Porter, the most liberal member of the Northern Ireland Government, tonight resigned his Cabinet post as Minister for Home Affairs the departure of Mr. Porter will be regretted by liberals and moderates and the Premier [Chichester-Clark] will find it virtually impossible to change his Government without swinging it to the Right.'

(Financial Times, August 6, 1970).

'A tougher line is to be followed by the security forces – troops and police – in Northern Ireland following the talks at the House of Commons yesterday between Mr. Chichester-Clark, and Mr. Maudling, Home Secretary The key words of the statement were these: "The army and the police in Northern Ireland will continue to work together in the closest co-operation. Their task, which they are determined to fulfil, is not simply to contain riotous behaviour but to seek out, and subject to the rule of law, those who take part in it and particularly those who foment and lead it."'

(The Guardian, January 19, 1971).

'SUPPORT FOR INTERNMENT GROWS IN ULSTER'

(Headline in The Guardian, March 15, 1971).

'The six members of the Social Democratic and Labour Party announced yesterday that they had withdrawn from the Northern Ireland Parliament and planned to set up "an alternative assembly".'

(The Guardian, July, 1971).

'No advance notice if internment is introduced in Ulster, Mr. Maudling tells backbenchers.'

(Headline in The Times, July 27, 1971).

Internment

Internment was introduced, a fortnight after this last announcement. Brian Faulkner's Stormont Government was responsible for making the decision, under powers it possessed through the Special Powers Act, but the British authorities co-operated willingly. It came with a pre-dawn swoop by the Army on August 9, 1971. 342 were taken from their beds and transferred by lorry to holding centres. In the first six months, a total of 2,357 people were arrested under the Special Powers Act.

Faulkner was responsible for instigating internment, and he was successful in selling the idea to the British Cabinet — though newspaper reports suggest that the Army was not so keen on the idea. However, it is now generally accepted, by British politicians at least, that internment was a ghastly mistake. It succeeded in alienating the Catholic population completely, and it provided the biggest boost to the Provisional IRA to date, as well as sparking off mass rioting throughout the Catholic areas of Belfast. The death toll rose significantly following the introduction of internment.

Brian Faulkner had replaced Chichester-Clark as Prime Minister on March 23, 1971. He was a man of great ambition, and as Minister for Home Affairs in the Stormont Government had once before been

responsible for the introduction of internment, in 1959. He appeared to believe that such a policy would work wonders. It was his greatest mistake. His period in office as Prime Minister lasted a mere twelve months, and he was to be the last Stormont Premier. He finally bowed out of politics altogether in August 1976.

As the Tory Government at last realised the futility of its 'hard line' policy, direct rule was introduced in March 1972, and the more amenable figure of William Whitelaw was put in charge of Northern Ireland affairs. It was an attempt to revise the disastrous policies of the previous two years, but in retrospect the attempt came two years too late.

Another black event helped to polarise attitudes before the Government changed its line in the Six Counties. This was 'Bloody Sunday' which shocked the world, when on January 30, 1972, a company of paratroopers killed 13 and wounded 14 people at the end of a demonstration in Derry. The massacre followed a Civil Rights march and meeting. As the bulk of the marchers left at the end of the meeting there had been some stone throwing. Troops moved in, and in the space of some twenty minutes the killings had taken place.

Unfortunately, the Widgery Tribunal report into 'Bloody Sunday' only served to obscure the facts. However, in an 'Insight' investigation into this massacre in the 'Sunday Times', the most important point made was that the operation was authorised by British Ministers in the knowledge of the risks of civilian casualties.

(On July 21, 1972, the Provisionals provided a gruesome echo, with 'Bloody Friday'. Twenty two explosions took place in Belfast on that day, including one in a crowded bus station. Nine people were killed and dozens badly injured. It did much to undermine the support which the Provisionals had built up since the introduction of internment the previous year).

New Assembly

With the introduction of direct rule in March, Whitelaw and the Tory Government unveiled a new scenario for Northern Ireland. They promised a new constitutional settlement, which included a new elected Assembly, with an Executive based on the principle of power-sharing, the introduction of a new voting system, and a Council of Ireland which would include representatives from both North and South.

Implementation of the new proposals were preceded by a plebiscite held on March 8, 1973, which resulted in an overwhelming vote in favour of retaining links with the U.K. 591,820 voted in favour, with 6,463 against. However, the size of this vote was not so significant as it seemed: only 61 per cent of the electorate voted, and it was mainly republican elements who boycotted the poll. 'Republican News' called for a boycott of the 'British plebiscite farce', and suggested the slogan, 'Spoil Your Vote and Spoil It Early.'

On the Unionist side, the Government was successful in persuading Brian Faulkner to accept the new proposals, and he became Chief Minister in the new Northern Ireland Executive. However, it soon became clear that the constitutional programme was not necessarily going to gain a smooth passage. The first meeting of the Assembly, on July 31, was disrupted by Loyalists. Opponents reserved their main venom for the embryonic Council of Ireland.

By this time, Tory and Labour had evolved what they called a bi-partisan policy on Northern Ireland. Thus Merlyn Rees inherited responsibility of the Whitelaw programme when the Labour Government came to power in March, 1974 – but it collapsed in May the same year when the Ulster Workers' Council strike paralysed the Six Counties, and caused the abandonment of the Assembly and the cancellation of plans for a Council of Ireland.

The impact of this strike caused many on the left who had paid unthinking lip service to the cause of Irish republicanism to undergo a period of reappraisal of their ideas. It also caused the final collapse of

the tottering Unionist Party edifice in Northern Ireland.

For Mr. Rees, the UWC strike was a major defeat, and it confirmed a shift in the balance of forces which had been taking place. It also meant that the Government, once again, had to re-think its policy.

The next proposal was for an elected Northern Ireland Convention which would (hopefully) work out details for a new Constitution. But by this time, the ultra-loyalists of the United Ulster Unionist Coalition were firmly in control. They won over half the seats in the elections for the Convention held in May, 1975. The Convention failed to reach agreement, and the only political result to emerge was the further fragmentation of the Unionist ranks with the departure of William Craig from the inner councils of the UUUC.

Craig's departure came as a shock. As 'The Guardian's' Belfast correspondent, Derek Brown, remarked: 'Unionist history is repeating itself in Northern Ireland. Just as the Ulster Unionist Party, thought by outsiders to be all powerful and everlasting, carved itself into two distinct factions in 1973, so now is the Loyalist coalition shaking itself apart. The divisive issue is the same, the proposition that Catholics, aspiring to a United Ireland should take part in a devolved government.' (The Guardian, September 11, 1975).

This issue, indeed, has been a constant barrier to constitutional settlement in Northern Ireland. It was his attempt to open some sort of dialogue with the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic that led to the downfall of Captain Terence O'Neill. It was the acceptance of the principle of power-sharing that brought about Brian Faulkner's demise from power in the Unionist movement in 1973.

However, few had expected William Craig to 'go over to the enemy' (as the Loyalists viewed it). Craig had long been seen as representing the soul of Orange orthodoxy. But this is what happened. Craig came to the conclusion that the crisis situation that faced Northern Ireland could only be dealt with if a Unionist government was prepared to offer Cabinet posts to members of the opposition SDLP.

The various groups represented in the Convention presented their proposals on September 30, 1975. As expected, the Loyalist majority turned its face implacably against any form of SDLP participation in government. And on October 24, Mr. Craig and three of his colleagues were expelled from the United Ulster Unionist Coalition.

The erosion of the Loyalist monolith continued. Where there had been one Unionist Party, there were now five. Unity continued to crumble: first, when plans to mount loyalist patrols to 'police' sensitive areas proved a flop, and, second, when Mr. Harry West (leader of the Official Unionist Party) held informal talks with members of the SDLP in the summer of 1976. By this time, the United Ulster Unionist Coalition had ceased to have any significance and had become merely a platform for the ambitions of Paisley and Ernest Baird (formerly Craig's deputy).

The erosion of Unionist unity continued, until it received a final rupture at the beginning of May, 1977. The strike instigated by the so-called United Unionist Action Council was swiftly condemned by Official Unionist leaders, and Mr. James Molyneaux, the Unionist leader at Westminster, announced the dissolution of the UUUC group in the Commons.

4. POLITICAL PARTIES IN NORTHERN IRELAND

One of the most interesting and dramatic political aspects of the period from 1970 onwards was the collapse of the old Unionist Party as the instrument of Protestant political hierarchy. It had remained unshaken since 1921, seemingly as permanent as the bowler hats and regalia of the Orangemen on parade. Now it is fragmented.

The Unionist Coalition contained the Official Unionist Party (led by Harry West), Paisley's Democratic Unionist Party, and — until October

1975 — Craig's Vanguard Unionist Party. Craig's place in the coalition was taken by Ernest Baird, who formed the United Ulster Unionist Movement at the end of 1975. A rump calling itself the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland remained outside under the leadership of Brian Faulkner, until his retirement from politics in August, 1976.

The groups within the 'Unionist Coalition' have veered from talk of complete Ulster independence (some have had hot-headed suggestions of a 'U.D.I.' situation), to a return to the Stormont system of majority (i.e., Protestant) rule.

The Coalition is a somewhat shaky alliance, and the U.W.C. strike indicated that its leaders had to run hard in order to keep up with their supporters. Its unity was cracked by the departure of William Craig, and further disrupted in 1976 by disagreements between Paisley and West, when the Official Unionists held a series of talks with the SDLP.

Today, Ian Paisley, the ranting leader of the Democratic Unionist Party is regarded as the bulwark of reaction. Interestingly enough, though, the DUP at one time prided itself on its 'realism'. The Democratic Unionists condemned internment, and in the early 'seventies Paisley went so far as to appear on Irish television and talk of the possibility of co-operation between North and South.

Without a doubt, the brains behind the DUP in those days was Desmond Boal, a lawyer, who represented the Shankhill Road in Stormont. In more recent years, the gut reaction of Paisley and his Free Presbyterian Church supporters has reasserted itself.

The concept of an independent Ulster has been aired increasingly in Loyalist circles in recent years. In November, 1976, the so-called 'Ulster Loyalist Central Co-ordinating Committee' put forward the idea of an 'Ulster Republic', in which 'the divided people of Ulster' would come together 'to build a new sovereign nation within the Commonwealth'. Others, outside this grouping, have been giving serious consideration to this concept, including Glen Barr, an influential figure in the Loyalist movement. Supporters of independence

believe that, with a population of only one and a half million, Northern Ireland could go it alone.

The Nationalist Party, prior to 1968, provided the main opposition force to the Unionist monolith, but this, too, has disintegrated and its leader, Eddie McAteer, has retired from politics. It has been largely replaced by the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). The SDLP was formed in August 1970, from a number of groupings in opposition to the Stormont Government. Leading members were: Gerry Fitt (originally elected as a Republican Labour M.P. both to Westminster and Stormont, and a Belfast City Councillor), Austin Currie (formerly a Nationalist Party M.P. at Stormont), and Ivan Cooper and John Hume, both of whom had been prominent in the Civil Rights Movement.

During its short life, the position of the SDLP has tended to shift. In its early years it went through a period of backing the rents and rates strike, and even withdrew its support from Stormont for a brief period in 1971. However, it participated in the short-lived Assembly and its members served on the Northern Ireland Executive. More recently, it has moved from an insistence on legally guaranteed 'power sharing' in any future government, to a position where they would accept promises of some involvement in such a government.

The SDLP has been portrayed as an attempt to form a 'responsible' Social Democratic Party, but whilst it has built up a solid base of electoral support in Catholic areas, it has failed to attract any Protestant support. Its long-term aim is a united Ireland under a non-denominational constitution, but it accepted the Whitelaw constitution as a basis for negotiation, and played an active role in the Convention which followed it.

Middle-class (and non-sectarian) aspirations are represented by the Alliance Party, formed in April 1970. The Alliance Party was born out of an organisation formed at the beginning of 1969 called the New Ulster Movement. It blossomed into a fully-fledged political party the following year and over the next few years received considerable financial backing. By 1972, it was claiming a membership of 10,000 — though, to date, it has failed to make the electoral break-

through which its well-heeled backers had hoped for.

The leader of the Alliance Party is Oliver Napier, a former Liberal. It identifies sectarianism as the main enemy in Northern Ireland, and sees the solution in terms of spreading reason and light.

There is also the Northern Ireland Labour Party, whose support has waned considerably over recent years. Whilst it has had close links with the British Labour Party, it has failed to come to grips with the current crisis, or to make any inroads into Protestant working class areas.

Other Groups:

In both communities in Northern Ireland, the groups which make much of the running in terms of activity tend to be somewhat fluid. At the time of writing, they can be summarised as follows:

The Ulster Defence Association (UDA): the major para-military organisation in the Protestant community, formed originally with the blessing of individuals like Craig in 1972. At its height it could muster over 50,000 members, but it has suffered from a number of splits and feuds with other bodies.

Despite this, it remains the biggest and best organised of the para-military groups, with support mainly concentrated in the Belfast area.

The Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF): This organisation has a longer history than any of the existing Protestant para-military groups, though much of this history is shadowy and obscure. It was banned in 1966, and for the next few years, the Stormont Government denied that it even existed. However, in the mid 'seventies, it enjoyed a brief period of legality, during which it formed a political wing called the Volunteer Party. This, however, failed to make any impact and soon vanished from the scene.

The UVF specialised in terrorist tactics, acts of sabotage, and so on. Support for this organisation has never been easy to gauge. It has spent most of the past decade as an illegal organisation, and it has never gone in for open displays of strength. In 1975, after a bloody orgy of assassinations, including the murder of members of the Miami Showband, the UVF was once again banned.

A number of other Protestant para-military groups exist, but they tend to be ephemeral – such as the Ulster Freedom Fighters (which is sometimes regarded as a murderous ‘front’ for one of the other groups) and the Orange Volunteers.

Provisional IRA: The ‘Provos’ have become the best-known and the most widely-publicised republican group, thanks to their determined physical force tactics. They have notched up quite a gruesome death toll over the past six years, taking an increasingly sectarian role in the struggle as positions have polarised.

The Provisionals split away from the official wing of the republican movement at the end of 1969. Ostensibly, the cause of the split was disagreement over the Socialist, and increasingly Marxist, philosophy being adopted by the republican movement, together with its abandonment of physical force tactics in favour of political involvement. But, in fact, the split has its origins within Fianna Fail (which was at the time Ireland’s governing party).

Alarmed at the direction in which Sinn Fein (the republican party) was moving during the sixties, elements within Fianna Fail made contact with republicans, particularly in the Six Counties. An offer of money and arms was made, on the condition that activity was concentrated in the North, and that there was an abandonment of any political activity.

As a result, the Provisional ‘Army Council’ was organised, its first press statement appearing on December 29, 1969. In January 1970, at Sinn Fein’s annual conference, Provisional supporters walked out and the break was complete.

According to ‘Eolas’, the international newsletter of the official Republican Movement (December, 1975); ‘undoubtedly the catalyst which led to the formation of the Provisionals was the Fianna Fail support for them. While it is hard to put an exact figure on the sums involved it is clearly very high. In one week alone in January 1970 the Provisionals obtained £800 from Dublin Government funds for the maintenance of their personnel in Belfast.’

Today, the Provisionals get much of their financial backing from the American Northern Irish Aid Committee (NorAid) – a belligerently right-wing body.

The Provisionals have concentrated on physical force activities, and have contributed a fair proportion of the destruction and bloodshed in Northern Ireland over the past few years. In the Autumn of 1975, Provisional activity spilled over into a direct attack on the official Republican Movement in Belfast in which over 50 were wounded and 11 killed in a fortnight of bloody violence.

In December, 1974, the Provisional IRA declared a ‘truce’, and there was a period of dialogue between the Provisionals and British Government representatives in Belfast. However, this ceasefire soon deteriorated into a state of bloody chaos, in which local units interpreted the situation as they saw fit.

The political programme of the Provisionals is, naturally enough, somewhat ambiguous, but it appears to favour some sort of federalism for the 32 counties of Ireland, with vague talk of putting the ‘communities of the nation’ into power.

The Official Republican Movement: represented by the Official IRA and the Republican Clubs in Northern Ireland. The Republican Clubs represent the political aspirations of the movement, and have succeeded in electing a smattering of local councillors in recent years. The Clubs are openly Marxist, and emphasise social conditions such as housing and jobs in their propaganda.

The Officials have, in the past, involved themselves deeply in the

civil rights movement, and declare that there is no 'military' solution to the problem in Northern Ireland. They call for a working class coalition involving the trade unions, tenants and community groups, cultural and youth organisations, to oppose sectarianism and to campaign for the repeal of the Emergency Provisions Act and for a Bill of Rights. The official Republican Movement declares its ultimate aim to be an Irish Socialist republic in which the wealth and the means of production, distribution and exchange are in the hands of Irish workers.

The Official IRA declared a ceasefire in May, 1972, and have maintained a 'low profile' since. Cathal Goulding, who is regarded as Chief-of-Staff of the Official IRA, described the present role of the organisation in an interview in "The Irish Times", on March 8, 1975:

'The Official IRA will always be involved in the political field, but its role to a great extent is that of a political army, in support of radical socialist policies within the Republican Movement. Our role is to support Sinn Fein whatever way we can.'

However, in 1975, the Officials were troubled by a vendetta from a breakaway group, the Irish Republican Socialist Party, which resulted in the murder of Billy McMillan, commander of the Official IRA in Belfast, in April 1975. Later the same year, savage attacks on official Republican members of the Provisionals forced the organisation on the defensive.

The Irish Republican Socialist Party (IRSP): Originally the IRSP emerged as a breakaway group from the Officials, at the end of 1974. It stresses ultra-left revolutionary Socialism, and is led by Seamus Costello, formerly described as Adjutant General of the Official IRA. It boasted amongst its leading members Bernadette McAliskey (nee Devlin), whilst Eamonn McCann acted as its apologist in the columns of the I.S. 'Socialist Worker'. However, in the following year, Bernadette McAliskey, together with many leading members of the IRSP in the North, resigned, reducing both the power and the potential of the organisation considerably.

The Irish Republican Socialist Party emerged because its founders

declared that the Official movement was 'neglecting the national question' – or, in other words, emphasising social issues at the expense of the pure flame of republican nationalism.

However, the IRSP seems to have been able to offer little more than an ultra-left version of Provisional physical force activity. It even has a shadowy para-military wing called the 'People's Liberation Army', which has been responsible for some sectarian and communal feuding, including a number of murders. It also attracted the support of some ex-Provisionals during the period of the Provo truce, though its total membership is difficult to estimate.

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA): NICRA was established in February 1967, though its origins can be traced back to an organisation founded in 1963 called the Campaign for Social Justice.

NICRA was responsible for much of the civil rights' agitation of the late 'sixties, when it combined middle class liberal opinion with a growing (official) republican influence. At the time it had a great impact on the minority communities, but escalating violence tended to undermine both its influence and its activity. It still remains a vocal body, backed by the Official Republican Movement. Recently, it has been campaigning for a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland, and in May 1975, on the eve of the Convention elections, it published a draft bill. NICRA maintained that any Bill of Rights must: Guarantee freedom for political thought and activity for all citizens in Northern Ireland. Guarantee the end of repressive laws which breach common law and contravene international human rights legislation. Guarantee the outlawing of discrimination against any citizen for reason of belief, religion, politics, sex, race or colour. Guarantee the establishment of law enforcement agencies acceptable to the overwhelming majority of the citizens.

People's Democracy: Originally this group was a loosely organised student-based body, attracting wide support on a broad but militant policy of civil rights, radical community politics, etc. It reached its

peak during the civil rights agitation of the late 'sixties, initiating direct action in a campaign of what was described as 'calculated Martyrdom'. It was PD that organised the march from Belfast to Derry at the beginning of 1969, which resulted in the ambush at Burntullet Bridge, outside Derry, where the marchers were attacked with bricks, stones, bottles and clubs by Loyalist extremists.

From then on, as the situation polarised, PD turned from ideas of reform to talk of revolution. As a result, it lost its broad base and gradually lapsed into a sterile Trotskyism.

Following the introduction of internment, People's Democracy gave its support to the Provisionals. Michael Farrell, its leader, declared that PD recognised the Provisionals as 'objectively attacking capitalism' and for a period of time the two organisations co-operated in such bodies as the Northern Resistance Movement. Later, People's Democracy, like other Trotskyite groups, flirted with the IRSP. Through it all, its influence ebbed until it reached vanishing point.

5. THE ROLE OF THE ARMY

Whilst the Government of the day might well have had the interests of big business in mind, it can be assumed that the decision to commit the British Army to Northern Ireland in August, 1969, was based on the belief that the Army had, at that time, an essential role in a peace-keeping capacity. In the summer of 1969 it was a decision welcomed by many on the left, and by members of the Catholic community who saw the Army as a force which would protect their homes and their interests from attack either by the R.U.C., the 'B Specials' or from 'freelance' Protestant groups.

To quote once again from 'Bogside off its knees' (New Society, August 21, 1969); it is clear that the Army had an undoubted impact when it prevented the 'B Specials' from storming the barricades into the Bogside

'He [the Commanding Officer of the B Specials] was apparently surprised by the arrival of the British troops..... He did not apparently realise that the army was present as a non-sectarian force to get between the combatants

The point was immediately made clear by the British commander who started putting his men between the two groups, although it proved difficult to clear the reluctant B Specials from the area.

'The Bogsiders immediately responded to this reduction of pressure by getting stewards to the barricades to clear them of people. They led the fighters away singing, "We shall overcome".....'

What happened after 1970 was the development of an openly partisan role by the Army, in which one community – the Catholic community – was regarded as hostile, when patrols were sent nightly through the streets in 'sneakers' and with blackened faces, and in which the military was used openly to aid the R.U.C. and the 'civil authority', to counter 'subversion', 'insurrection', etc., etc. In other words, the British Army became merely a more sophisticated and more powerful version of the Royal Ulster Constabulary in the eyes of the Catholic community! Maudling, Carrington, and successive Army commanders who have given disastrous advice, must take a heavy responsibility for the lives lost in the conflict since 1970, including those of over 250 soldiers to date.

What was more sinister was the development of new techniques of a 'counter-insurgency' nature, including surveillance, interrogation and physical force by the Army. CS gas and rubber bullets both had their baptism in Northern Ireland. The treatment of prisoners by the Army has already been the subject of much inquiry, including one by Sir Edmund Compton. Details of specific cases were dealt with by John McGuffin, in a book entitled 'The Guineapigs', published by Penguin Books in November 1974. When internment was introduced, a handful of internees were picked out to be subjected to beatings, denial of sleep and sensory deprivation.

The role of the S.A.S. (Special Air Service – a 'secret operations' wing of the Army), together with the Military Reconnaissance Force, have been revealed only sketchily. For some time, Army Headquarters

at Lisburn, Northern Ireland, denied many of the activities of their plain-clothed, armed, military personnel, carrying out what is sometimes known as 'intelligence' operations. Some of these operations are highly sinister, others border on the bizarre for example, the laundry van which went around Catholic areas of Belfast touting for cut-price custom, whilst at the same time collecting information for the Army. It is also claimed that massage parlours and an evangelical bookshop have been used as 'cover' for Army operations.

One example of the Army's plain clothes operations was given in a news item in 'The Guardian', on July 16, 1975:

'A soldier in plain clothes, driving an unmarked civilian car, was attacked by a crowd in the Falls Road, Belfast. The man escaped, but an Ingram M10 (a 9mm. silent machine pistol, made in the USA and issued in Britain to the S.A.S.) and documents were captured. At a press conference in Dublin, the Official IRA produced photographs of the weapon, with tape recordings also said to have been taken from the car..... Army H.Q. at Lisburn said that the soldier was engaged in 'routine surveillance' duties, in accordance with military policy.'

It is worth noting that Brigadier Frank Kitson (author of a book on the Army's role in 'counter-insurgency' techniques) was stationed in Belfast for some time, and it was during his period of duty in Northern Ireland that the Military Reconnaissance Force was formed.

Kitson's book has been followed by a more recent work entitled 'Riot Control', by Major General A.J. Deane-Drummond, expanding the themes developed by military strategists in Northern Ireland. All this helps to add credence to allegations that the military hierarchy sees Northern Ireland as a useful test area for 'counter insurgency' tactics.

Another ominous factor was the revelation that the British Army now has computerised information on something like 50 per cent of the population of Northern Ireland, and that this data bank is being added to daily. According to 'The Times', the system is 'the most

advanced to be adopted by a security force in Northern Europe.'

Those who argue that the British Army can still be regarded as a credible 'peace-keeping' force need to examine their case seriously in the light of the Army's record since late-1970. By any standards there is a need for scaling down military activities, and a cessation of the Army's 'counter insurgency' activities, which have given it a sinister political role.

However, the call for the immediate withdrawal of British forces (mounted by such organisations as the 'Troops Out Now' campaign) does not provide the answer. It is an abrogation of responsibility. It is a call that ignores the need for a political solution to the conflict. The intensification of sectarian bitterness over the past few years has been such that the immediate withdrawal of the Army could have tragic results. Those who make such a call should be fully aware of the possible consequences.

6. 'BRITISH IMPERIALISM'

The basic premise on which many ultra-left groups base their position on Northern Ireland is that the British presence in the Six Counties is an example of British imperialism, and that the republican struggle is therefore anti-imperialist. Indeed, it clouds much of the rhetoric from republican groups themselves.

This premise allows, to put it mildly, an over-simplified view of the conflict, in which opposing forces are seen in terms of black and white and in which a distorted picture of the Protestant community and its aspirations is presented. It even leads certain so-called revolutionary Socialist groups to unquestioning support of the Provisional IRA.

But this premise is a myth. Indeed, maintaining the Northern Ireland economy, not to mention the heavy financial cost of the presence of

the British Army, outweighs all economic benefits at present. In 1975, it was revealed that financial aid to the Six Counties amounted to **£400 million**, compared with £50 million in 1957 and £200 million in 1973. This sum is more than the total raised in revenue from Northern Ireland through taxation, rates and other sources.

'British Imperialism' (to use a convenient shorthand phrase here) may have been responsible for the conquest and settlement of Ireland, but the rationale behind events in the Twentieth Century are far more complex. This is not to deny the continuing economic control exercised by British capitalism in Ireland, North and South, or the growing influence of British and multinational firms, but this hardly necessitates direct political or military control.

What we saw in the establishment and in the rule of the Stormont Government was a Protestant hierarchy maintaining its own power and influence, aided and abetted by their class colleagues in the Tory Party in England. In Britain, the landlord class was submerged by the new industrial power during the 19th and early 20th Century. In Northern Ireland, the pattern was slightly different, with the fox hunting gentry maintaining political power – and it was able to use religion as a weapon in its struggle, controlling the powerful freemasonry of the Orange Order.

Until recently, the Unionist establishment was able to turn automatically to the Tories in Britain for support – as it had done during the terms of office of Gladstone and Asquith. But it became clear in 1972 that the Conservatives were no longer prepared to prop up the old order. Self-interest was now a more powerful influence. Investment in the Province had to be protected, and this could not be achieved by preserving the Stormont regime with an indefinite military occupation and an ever-present level of violence and bloodshed.

It is ironical that the Conservative Party was the agent responsible for shattering the old Unionist Party, and at the same time unleashing a new mood of Ulster nationalism in the Protestant community.

Whatever the reasons, there is no doubt that the Tory Party today is

as keen to find a permanent solution to the Irish situation as is the Labour Party. It has learned a lesson since 1970 – but, tragically, many politicians in Northern Ireland and in Britain have become prisoners of the sectarian position created by their predecessors. The circle is, indeed, a vicious one.

'A Revolutionary Situation.....?'

At the heart of this myth about 'British Imperialism' is the belief that in some way Northern Ireland is in a 'revolutionary situation'. Again, this is nonsense – unless one believes that the constant pattern of violence and counter-violence represents this situation. In terms of moves towards a class-directed radical change in the basis of society, Northern Ireland is even further from a 'revolution' than parts of the U.K. Indeed, it has moved backwards since 1968.

At the height of the Civil Rights' agitation, basic demands were being made which amounted to a reform of Northern Ireland political and social institutions. In turn, these would have ended the Unionist political stranglehold. Now, the demands have become fragmented. The Provos fight for their own brand of green nationalism, the Loyalist para-military groupings react, whilst parties like the SDLP are now no longer in a position to see further than a 'peaceful solution' to the conflict. There are now no common demands, and the sectarianism has been deepened and intensified by the years of struggle.

Before there can be any Socialist change, there must be a 'normalisation' of the situation – that is, there must be the emergence in Northern Ireland (and, of course, the 26 county Republic) of a level of class-consciousness expressed in the political institutions and in a strong, united trade union movement.

In retrospect, one can trace a number of key events that pushed Northern Ireland further down its bloody path. Three, in particular, have been responsible for creating the black pattern of conflict that

now exists – the emergence of the Provisionals, the two years of disastrous Tory policies at the beginning of the '70s, and the introduction of internment.

Baron Frankenstein gave life to a grotesque distortion, and found that he could no longer control his monster. The parallel is apt in Northern Ireland.

The Provisionals in Northern Ireland have been successful in provoking an unprecedented level of violence and bloodshed. They have also launched attacks on any possible rivals for the allegiance of the Catholic community. Both the official Republican Movement and the SDLP have been subjected to Provisional violence and intimidation. Thus, they have acted to undermine the political struggle and heighten the conflict in the streets.

The situation in Northern Ireland has spilt over to Britain itself. A number of Provisional-inspired bombings led to the introduction of the Prevention of Terrorism Act (one of the most undemocratic pieces of legislation to appear on the statute books in recent decades), in November, 1974, not to mention the alienation of large sections of the British working class.

Peace – and Politics

At a time when unemployment is mounting in the North (by the summer of 1976 it had reached the highest level for 35 years, and totalled 11.7 per cent of the working population), social conditions are deteriorating, and when public spending cuts are hitting the Six Counties, attempts to mount campaigns on vital social issues are made tragically, in the face of deep sectarian divisions. In such a climate, the 'Better Life for All' campaign launched by the Northern Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in the Spring of 1976 was a brave attempt to repudiate sectarianism and violence, and press for security of employment, better housing and better social services for the people of Northern Ireland. It was backed by thousands

of workers in demonstrations throughout the Six Counties.

In the summer of 1976, the 'Peace Women' movement emerged in West Belfast – seemingly as a grass-roots reaction against the violence that was tearing at the city. Thousands of working class people joined the marches for peace. However, the mounting demonstrations and scenes of reconciliation were based on a somewhat tenuous unity. As Tomas Mac Giolla (president of the Official Sinn Fein) has pointed out, peace is a revolutionary demand. But, as a slogan, it is a word that can be exploited to distort the true aspirations of the people. Thus, the way in which the 'Peace People' have been courted by the media, and given endorsement by the powers-that-be, must give rise to reservations. And, indeed, by the Spring of 1977, certain splits seem to be emerging in their ranks.

The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association summed up the dilemma of the 'Peace People' in an article in its journal towards the end of 1976, which said:

'The movement's problem is that its aim of peace is a political one which must be achieved by making political demands and waiting for political decisions to be implemented. But it cannot survive as a broadly based non-sectarian organisation if it makes specific political demands, and until specific political reforms are introduced peace cannot be achieved. In other words the Peace Movement will survive as long as it continues to sing hymns, but if it attempts to sing anything else it is likely to collapse.'

However, the trade union 'Better Life for All' campaign has been making political demands. And the need for the realisation of these demands – for work, housing, and better social services – are revealed clearly in the depressing statistics of life in Northern Ireland.

Thirty-five per cent of all houses in the Six Counties need repair or replacement. Almost half a million people live below the poverty line. Indeed, the people of Northern Ireland are poorer than those in the rest of the United Kingdom, and their children are more likely to

die before they are a year old, according to a Child Poverty Action Group pamphlet. Meanwhile, the welfare payments they receive are less generous than in other areas of the U.K. Since 1945, no region of the United Kingdom has had a higher unemployment rate.

One response to this background has been soaring emigration — the number leaving Northern Ireland is now running at twice what it was ten years ago.

Alternatives

A number of differing scenarios have been presented by the press and politicians covering the British Government's options in Northern Ireland. They range from complete, and unconditional, withdrawal to complete integration of the Province within the U.K.

Each option is fraught with difficulties, and ultimately the future must be for the Northern Irish people themselves to decide. Again this is a truism for obviously no solution can succeed without common consent. What is lacking is the climate — or, in many cases, the will — to reach that solution.

However, the kind of meaningful moves that could be made would be those designed to reduce the level of conflict and restore a measure of confidence that is so sadly lacking. Such moves could include:

- * **An injection of investment into the Six Counties to provide housing, employment, social services, etc.**
- * **A Bill of Rights, on the lines suggested by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association.**
- * **A reconstituted police force, to replace the R.U.C., to eradicate the sectarian image of the police.**
- * **The re-convening of the Convention, on a wider basis, without the imposition of a time limit on its deliberations.**
- * **A drastic reappraisal of the Army's role in Northern Ireland, and its withdrawal from patrolling duties which have provoked much of the violence.**

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