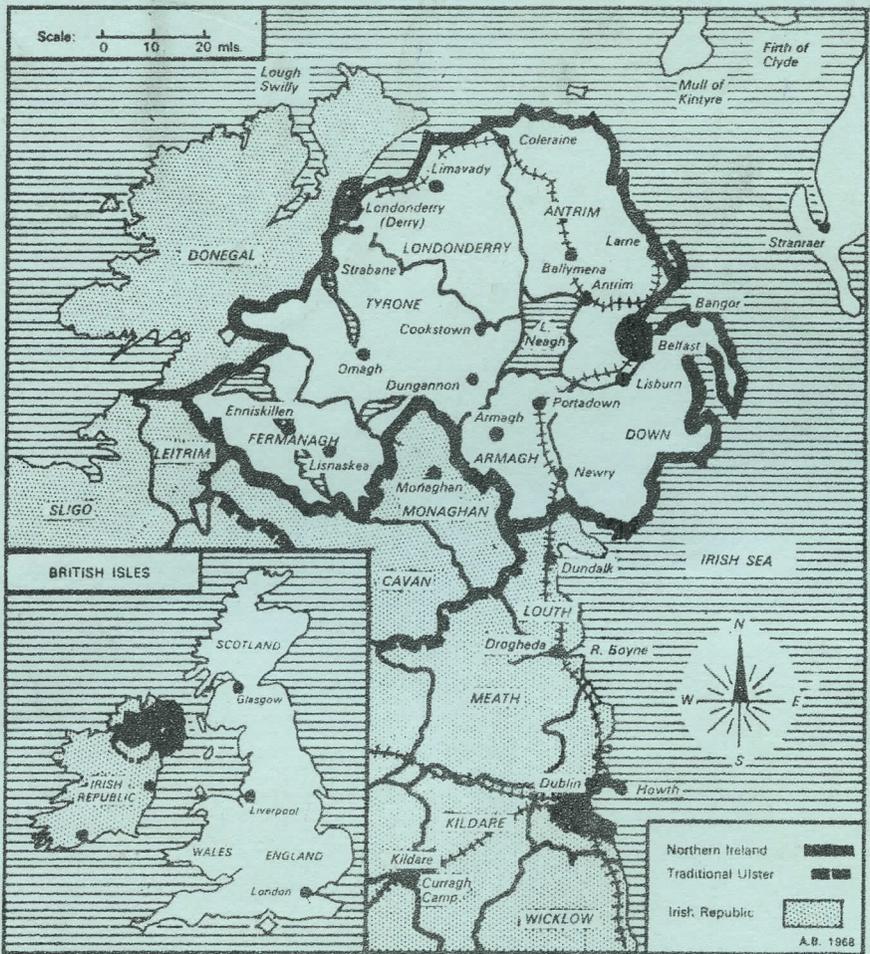


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# Background To



by  
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# Northern Ireland

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(5p)

## BACKGROUND TO NORTHERN IRELAND

The reasons for the communal strife which has troubled Northern Ireland since the little Statelet was formed fifty years ago under the Government of Ireland Act 1920 go back into Irish and British history. This is a part of Britain's unfinished colonial business, aggravated by the circumstances of fifty years ago, but there are some newer factors also.

### PHYSICAL FACTS

There are six countries - Londonderry, Antrim, Down, Armagh, Tyrone and Fermanagh. The "traditional" province of Ulster also included Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan, but these were jettisoned in 1920 by the "Protestants" who saw that if they were included there might not be a "loyalist" majority.

The area is about 5,500 sq. miles, smaller than Yorkshire. The population is about 1,500,000, much smaller than Yorkshire. Roughly two-thirds (1,000,000) are "Protestant", and one-third (500,000) "Catholic". They are unevenly spread. Tyrone and Fermanagh, the two counties with a "Catholic" majority, have 100,000 "Catholics", while Belfast, where "Catholics" are less than one-third, has about 114,000. In many areas, especially central Belfast and Derry, there is rigid segregated living; in some areas both communities live side by side. The people are friendly, helpful, and sturdily independent. Although Northern Ireland was always thought to have no exploitable natural resources - except its fertile land and its tourist attractions - there is now much prospecting going on for minerals and oil. The traditional industries, linen, cotton textiles and shipbuilding are declining, but still vigorous. Northern Ireland is still a good place to spend a holiday in, and even today you can be in many places which show little or no sign of trouble. The magnificent cliffs and coasts of the north are legendary.

Unemployment is twice the U.K. average, and in some "Catholic" areas of Belfast is 40 or 45 per cent.

### ORANGE AND GREEN

The terms "Catholics" and "Protestants" are given a meaning which is not understood elsewhere. "Protestants" are unionists, believing in the union of Northern Ireland with Great Britain. "Catholics" are all the rest. These terms are merely the usual names given to the two sections of the community. Neither "Protestants" or "Catholics" are necessarily members of Churches, although many of them are, because church-going is more usual than in Britain. The writer knows of one authentic case of a man, questioned about his religion, giving the answer "Unionist". A Pakistani, finding himself involved in a pub argument, protested that he was a Moslem, whereupon both protagonists angrily demanded: "Yes, but are you a Catholic Moslem or a Protestant Moslem?" This last story is probably apocryphal, but it explains the position very accurately

indeed. There are, of course, theological and doctrinal differences between the two groups - as there are between the different Protestant sects - but this is not what the fighting is about. It is not a religious war.

Further, while "Protestant" is usually synonymous with Unionist, "Catholics" are by no means all Nationalists. Even today a majority of Northern Ireland Catholics would prefer to remain citizens of the U.K. What they seek is a fair crack of the whip in their own land.

These explanations now made, the use of the terms "Catholic" and "Protestant" will hereafter be the conventional Northern Ireland one, and the use of inverted commas will cease.

### POLITICAL REALITIES

Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom - a status which cannot be altered without the consent of its people expressed through Stormont. Under the Government of Ireland Act, Westminster retains control of foreign policy, foreign trade, Customs and Excise, postal services, Inland Revenue, etc., and Art. 75 gives Westminster the right to ultimate jurisdiction in Northern Ireland.

Twelve M.P.s are elected to Westminster, and for fifty years these have been mostly Unionists who have allied themselves with Conservatives at Westminster. Fifty-two M.P.s are elected to Stormont, which has powers not unlike those of a large County Council, although there are sixty-eight Local Authorities too for which councillors have to be elected.

Unionists have maintained themselves in power at Stormont for fifty years. Proportional Representation, used at first, and the direct vote introduced in 1929, did not much alter a Chamber consisting generally of about 40 Unionists and 12 non-Unionists. Strongly backed by the Orange Order, Unionists knew they had only to maintain their voting solidarity to retain power. They did this by emphasizing the "danger from the south", "the border", and by assuming a "siege mentality", and a monopoly of loyalty. Thus, by definition, all Protestants were hardworking and loyal, while Catholics were idle, dirty, feckless, and subversive. Even though there were liberal and moderate people in the Party, this was not difficult because of the recurring activity of the IRA, and the conservative face which the Catholic Church wears in Ireland.

Some think the influence of the Orange Order is over-emphasised, but it is undeniably great. The Unionist Council, controlling the Unionist Party, retains one-sixth of 800 seats for Orangemen, and a Unionist would find it hard to secure nomination as a candidate unless he was an Orangemen. Almost all members of successive Governments have been members of the Order.

With a rigid voting pattern many elections were so predictable, that many seats returned members unopposed - some for nearly thirty years. A vote was often no more than a declaration of where the voter stood on the "constitutional issue," i.e. whether he was "loyal" or not. One Protestant fear has been that Catholics would "out-breed" them, as Catholic children were always more than

half the school population. This has not happened - mainly because of emigration of Catholics. Some think that Protestants have deliberately made things difficult for Catholics to ensure this result. The idea of "keeping Catholics in their place" has weakened, but its hold on some minds is obsessive, especially in times like the present.

All elections are on the British system, and no general complaints are made about elections for Westminster and Stormont. Local Authority elections, however, long complicated by business and financial qualifications (generally favouring Protestants), have attracted many complaints of gerrymandering, which the facts appear to justify.

Catholics, in fact, complain of discrimination in every department of life - jobs, houses, schools, social and political opportunities. In employment it is not always easy to prove, but it undoubtedly exists. Trade Unions are officially against it, but even they have gone along with "local custom" in many places. The allocation of houses is badly biased and, when Ward boundaries are drawn on communal lines, it becomes easy to guarantee a Unionist Council even where there is a heavy majority of Catholics. Sometimes this happens in reverse, but not often.

Schools and training colleges are mostly segregated, Catholics and Protestants being educated separately, and even playing different games, so that they cannot play with each other out of school hours. Many teachers have never had contact with the thinking and educational ideas of their opposite numbers. Mixing takes place most at University level. The Catholic Church refused the secular education offered, and many blame them for the present position, but it is hard to believe that many Protestants are not just as obdurate, and are glad that the Catholic Church rules out common education. In many of the spheres of social and semi-official public committees, Catholics are not represented in anything like the numbers their population would justify, and even in health and hospital matters, the Mater Infirmorum Hospital, a Catholic teaching hospital of some standing, which treats both communities in Belfast, is discriminated against financially, with "the constitution" used as the reason or the excuse.

#### HOW THE PRESENT TROUBLES HAVE DEVELOPED

1965

With reconciliation in the air, Captain O'Neill (Prime Minister) invited Mr. Lemass to Belfast. This alarmed his hard-liners, and a back-bench group was formed to keep Captain O'Neill in line. Mr. Paisley was imprisoned for the first time. A sinister "Ulster Volunteer Force" arose, named after the gun-running Protestants of 1914.

1966

After ugly murders of Catholics, the UVF was outlawed - the first time the Special Powers Act was used against Protestants.

1967

Civil Rights Association formed, modelled on British Council for Civil Liberties, and began marches (on CND pattern) seeking social justice for all, gaining much public sympathy.

1968

Minister for Home Affairs (Craig) banned a march in Derry because it would "cause trouble in a Protestant area". The defying of the ban attracted world-wide publicity. Protestants and Police attacked marchers in Duke Street - see all over the world on television. This was the beginning of the Protestant backlash.

The Peoples' Democracy, a student-based group, was formed at Queens University. In November, under pressure from Westminster, O'Neill announced desired reforms:-

1. Universal points system for house allocation.
2. Appointment of Ombudsman.
3. Abolition of business votes in local elections.
4. Suspension of Derry City Council, replaced by a Commission.
5. Special Powers Act to be put into cold storage, pending review.

In spite of Unionist fears, the reform movement was gaining its objectives.

1969

Peoples' Democracy marched, against advice, from Belfast to Derry, harassed by Protestants mobs, with a vicious attack at Burntollet bridge, with Police and B Specials apparently aiding and abetting the attackers.

O'Neill announced "One Man - One Vote", and Chichester-Clark resigned from Government in protest. O'Neill's own resignation later was precipitated by explosions damaging Belfast's water and electricity supplies.

Rioting broke out in Protestant Shankill Road, and in Derry, where the march of the Apprentice Boys of Derry resulted in confrontation of Begside Catholics and the Police. Violence flared throughout Northern Ireland. Defenceless Catholics built barricades to protect themselves from marauding Protestants. Over 1800 families (1450 Catholic) were burned, bombed, shot, or intimidated out of their homes. British Army called in to protect Catholics and restore peace.

The Cameron Commission confirmed many complaints made against Police and B Specials. The Hunt Commission advised disarming the Police and disbanding the B Specials, to be replaced with a non-sectarian force under Army control. Protestants were never reconciled to these Reports, which the Government had to accept, and rioting broke out again in Shankill as a protest against the Army's "soft" policy towards Catholics.

Until late in the year the IRA had not been in evidence, but they now infiltrated into the Civil Rights Movement, whereupon most Protestants and many Catholics left. The IRA, at this time, severely limited in vision and in numbers, knew that if Civil Righters obtained by non-violent means what the IRA had always said Irishmen must fight and die for, they (the IRA) would be a laughing stock. They also took up their traditional role as the defenders of defenceless Catholics.

### 1970

Although all the reforms, except the suspension of the Special Powers Act, were legislated for, the reforms were too slow to show themselves in the lives of ordinary people - and some Protestant authorities dragged their feet.

The Westminster elections returned Conservatives to power in Britain, and the Unionists in Northern Ireland took new heart. The IRA split, and began shooting and bombing, obviously with illegally obtained arms. (Protestants were well armed, having been granted arms licences in large numbers, and many of the old B Specials had never surrendered their weapons. Few Catholics applied for licences, as they would be considered "unfit persons", and noted as subversives).

The Army began extensive arms searches in Catholic areas for IRA arms, damaging many innocent Catholic homes, for which there was no compensation. Catholics began increasingly to feel the Army was a tool of the Unionists, and that the IRA was their only reliable defence.

### 1971

Major Chichester-Clark, now Prime Minister, was urged to protest against the Army's "soft" treatment of Catholics, and resigned after three soldiers were murdered at Ligniel, a crime which, with many others, has not yet been solved. The new P.M., Mr. Faulkner, was thought to be a hard-liner, but surprised many by appointing a Northern Ireland Labour member, not an M.P., (David Bleakley), as Minister for Community Relations. He also proposed Parliamentary Committees with Opposition Chairmen. This was widely welcomed but rejected by Paisley, Craig, and other hard-liners. Mr. Bleakley resigned before his six-month stint of office was up, mainly because he objected to the Unionist Government "over-reacting" to IRA and Catholic measures and thus, in his opinion, causing more trouble than they sought to prevent.

### THE LAST FEW MONTHS

In the early summer much liberal opinion regarded the yearly sectarian marches as dangerous coat-trailing exercises. Catholics voluntarily renounced their marches in the public interest, a move described by one prominent Orangeman as "provocative".

The Orange Order insisted on a wide programme of Orange Parades, but their plan to march through the Catholic town of Dungiven was banned. They disregarded this, and the Army was engaged in hard hand-to-hand fighting with Orangemen after they had broken through a Police cordon on the outskirts. The mob was only dispersed after the use of rubber bullets and CS Gas. After the ban on his Ulster Protestant Volunteers' parade through Derry, Mr. Paisley announced on July 31st that he had joined the Apprentice Boys Dromara Browning Club, and hoped to march with them on August 12th. All parades were then banned, and the policy of internment without charge or trial instituted on August 9th. The Army undertook the midnight searches and arrests, thus causing further alienation of the Catholics. Rioting and violence flared up anew, and within a few weeks of internment, more deaths and damage had occurred than throughout the previous three years. Catholics and Protestants burned out each others houses, and sometimes their own in order to prevent them being occupied by "the other sort". 2100 families moved in Belfast alone, 60 per cent of them Catholic, in a migration which at first looked haphazard, but which later appeared to Catholics to be a sinister exercise, by Protestants, of strategic significance. Catholic enclaves are now almost entirely isolated by waste land in a kind of cordon sanitaire. The Chairman of the government-sponsored Community Relations Commission was reported as saying: "It looks as if the lines of battle have been drawn". Certainly in late September and early October, talk of open Civil War was in the air.

Throughout the summer, shootings and bombings continued; for some the IRA openly admitted responsibility, but for others no responsibility has yet been fixed. In rioting by Catholics in Derry in early August, two men, Desmond Beattie and Seamus Cusack, were shot. The Army say they were ringleaders in the riot, but some responsible Catholics assert they were unarmed, and were shot in irresponsible and random action by troops. So incensed were they that John Hume (A Civil Rights man dedicated to non-violence) and his colleagues in the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) refused to co-operate further in the processes of Stormont. Since internment, they have coupled internment also to their objections, and the impression gained over a wide area of Northern Ireland is that Catholics want nothing more whatever to do with Stormont. They have repudiated it, whatever reforms it promises or even implements. Similar deaths in Belfast in October brought the Catholics to a further pitch of anger. These two lots of deaths, and the whole issue of internment and the ill-treatment of internees, has been referred, by the Republic of Ireland, to the European Court of Human Rights.

It is possible and right to say that, within its terms of reference, the Army has done a difficult job well. It is also possible and right to say that there have been mistakes, and some indiscipline. It is also possible and right to query whether the Army, once seen as part of the solution, may not be now a part of the problem.

Unionist hard-liners loudly demanded the blowing up of border roads, and this was eventually done by the Army. It caused little more than derision and

inconvenience, for few believed it would stop any illegal movements. The purpose was probably to re-emphasise "the Border" as the source of Northern Ireland's distress, and to discredit the "Tripartite - try anything" talks held by Mr. Heath, Mr. Lynch and Mr. Faulkner. But whether Northern Ireland's external relationships need to be revised or not, the present problems are internal, and if the IRA was completely defeated or excluded, these problems would still remain. The hard-liners have ensured that British and Irish troops face the regrettable dangers of confrontation across the Border, and that Northern Ireland may be increasingly recognised by the world community as an international threat to peace.

The SDLP also instigated a campaign of civil disobedience, by the non-payment of rent and rates. A number of Catholic priests protested against what seemed, not without justification, to be the unequal administration of justice, by refusing to complete Census Forms. Stormont has legislated to enable earnings, etc, to be "attached" to meet the mounting debts, but very many thousands are involved in these protests, and it is not easy to see what can be done about them. In some small Catholic enclaves the IRA seem to be in control, and it looks as if in some instances they have taken over the civil disobedience campaign also. This means that worthy men like John Hume run the risk, if not of being isolated, of being forced into more extreme positions than they themselves would wish for.

#### CHRISTMAS 1971

Before Xmas the shootings and bombings increased so that all decent people must have been sickened and appalled, but there were indications that something like a temporary cessation might occur over the Xmas period. The hope is that this can be extended, and that such initiatives as Mr. Harold Wilson's can be built on. It seems that it may have been with the connivance and co-operation of Mr. Heath that he visited Northern Ireland recently, returning with a correct assessment of the gravity of the situation. There are now many sets of proposals, but Mr. Wilson has grasped, almost alone among the others, that whatever now happened in Northern Ireland must take place in the full glare of world publicity and be subject to the full scrutiny of world opinion. Television alone - and there are other reasons - makes these current troubles different from any others.

Protestant vigilante groups have been patrolling roads for some time past, and in fact, the private armies on either side begin to take shape. Militancy has escalated from small beginnings. There would be nothing better than to start again before Duke Street, Derry in 1968. But the clock cannot be put back, and the fears of Catholic and Protestant, however unreal they may appear to outsiders, are only too real to those who experience them within Northern Ireland.

### WHO IS REALLY RESPONSIBLE FOR THE VIOLENCE?

Surprising as it may seem, this is not an easy question to answer. Certainly the IRA is responsible for a good deal of it, but not for all of it. Protestant extremists, anarchistic groups, and criminal elements from outside, taking advantage of the breakdown of law and order, may all be involved. Some of the hardest battles fought by the Army have been against Protestants, and names like Dungiven, Shankill and Newtownards come easily to mind. The IRA too is split - the Regulars, political and socialist; the Provisionals, nationalist, even fascist, more overtly violent. Both sections seek the unity of Ireland.

It is too easy to blame the IRA for all the violence. They may be blamed for perhaps 75 or 80 per cent of it, but that still leaves one outrage in four or five to be answered for by someone else. Many of the worst individual acts of demonstrative violence remain mysteries, and their perpetrators may never be known for certain.

It is often claimed that the Republic of Ireland might be more helpful in containing the IRA menace. It is strange to see the freedom which IRA men enjoy in the Republic, and the public collections which are taken in support to the republican cause there. On the other hand, it has to be said that the Government of the Republic has its own internal troubles, and must not too eagerly turn its face against the chance of re-unification. In addition, the amount of support given to the IRA is probably much exaggerated. The reporting of much that happens in Ireland, north or south of the Border, has been very uneven. There have been few reports of the large public meetings and ecumenical gatherings in Dublin, Belfast and elsewhere, praying for peace and seeking peaceful solutions.

### IS THERE A SILVER LINING?

Throughout the last three years, Church groups, and groups of Churches of all denominations, have worked together as never before, continuing as far as they are able the progress in community relations made in the previous five years. One of the difficulties is that the goodwill engendered locally among people and churches seems unable to manifest itself on other levels especially on the political level. This is something which politicians mainly must work at, and therefore the attempts now being made to get politicians of all varieties together to talk must be commended and supported.

Many Quakers have played and are playing a full and worthy role in the socially-reconciling projects of all kinds which abound. Some of these Friends, it should be noted, are not merely responding to the present emergency, but have devoted themselves to these tasks of love and reconciliation since the founding of Northern Ireland, and even before that.

Successful Work Camps, and many individual efforts are also adding to the total of prayerful and concerned goodwill. From the middle ground of opinion have sprung many societies devoted to healing the breaches, and to building a more normal and trusting society. PACE (Protestant and Catholic Encounter) is one such; NUM (New Ulster Movement) is another very influential one, with its brain-child, the new Alliance Party, which will put up moderate candidates in the next elections.

Catholics fear they are condemned, by the Unionist status quo, to live as second class citizens in their own land. Protestants fear that they may be condemned to live in an Irish State largely influenced by the conservatism of Irish Roman Catholicism.

Only by understanding these fears at their deepest level can any outsider make a meaningful contribution. In the last resort, the problems have to be solved by Northern Ireland men and women themselves.

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