

The Harp, the Hammer and the Plough:
The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement
and the World Beyond, 1963-1969

Michel Jacques Gagné

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ABSTRACT

The Harp, the Hammer and the Plough : The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement and the World Beyond, 1963-1969

Michel Jacques Gagné

The existing historical literature dealing with the period that immediately precedes the Northern Ireland 'Troubles' (1969-1998) does not fully appreciate the extent to which international events influenced the Northern Ireland civil rights movement. Traditional approaches (i.e.: Nationalist, Unionist and Marxist) focus almost exclusively on the domestic causes of the movement and little on the impact of foreign events. This thesis takes an international approach to Northern Ireland history to suggest that while the civil rights movement was composed in large part of Catholics with a nationalist or republican slant, the civil rights movement was, in essence, a coalition of moderate and radical socialists spurred on by the international context of the late sixties.

The speeches, pamphlets, and memoirs generated by former leaders of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement demonstrate how deeply influenced this movement was by the struggle for human rights and socialism taking place simultaneously in the world beyond Irish shores. These sources also reveal profound ideological and methodological cleavages that divided the movement's leadership into three major ideological factions. These factions are identified here as constitutional nationalists, institutional Marxist republicans (or 'red republicans'), and unaligned revolutionary socialists (or 'New Leftists'). Because of this ideological diversity, the movement was unable to congeal into a united front and rapidly disintegrated into its component parts in the face of rising sectarian violence.

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I would have wished for my father to see this thesis completed, but to our loss, he went to be with his Lord in August 2004. I nonetheless express my gratitude to him for believing in me and instilling in me the love of the Book. He was, and continues to be, the person most responsible for making a student of history and politics out of me. I therefore dedicate this work to him.

Michel Jacques Gagné,
2005

À la mémoire de mon père,

Réal Gagné

1934-2004

qui m'a légué l'amour du Livre.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AOH	Ancient Order of Hibernians
B SPECIALS	Ulster Special Constabulary (auxiliary police)
CDU	Campaign for Democracy in Ulster
CPI	Communist Party of Ireland
CSJ	Campaign for Social Justice
DCAC	Derry Citizens Action Committee
DHAC	Derry Housing Action Committee
EEC	European Economic Community
HCL	Homeless Citizens' League
IRA	Irish Republican Army (‘Official’ and ‘Provisional’)
LOL	Loyal Orange Lodge
NAACP (USA)	National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
NCCL (U.K.)	National Council for Civil Liberties
NDP	National Democratic Party
NICRA / CRA	(Northern Ireland) Civil Rights Association
NILP	Northern Ireland Labour Party
NP	Nationalist Party
PD	People's Democracy
QUB	Queen's University, Belfast
RLP	Republican Labour Party
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
SCLC (USA)	Southern Christian Leadership Conference
SDS (USA)	Students for a Democratic Society
SDLP	Social Democratic and Labour Party
SF	Sinn Féin
SNCC (USA)	Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee
UVF	Ulster Volunteer Force
RUC	Royal Ulster Constabulary
WTS	Wolfe Tone Society
YSA	Young Socialist Alliance

A NOTE ON NOMENCLATURE

In writing the history of a politically divided society, one is sometimes forced to make certain politically-loaded choices as to the contested names of places, people, and concepts. In the case of Northern Ireland, words such as ‘Catholic’, ‘nationalist’, and ‘republican’ (as well as the terms ‘Protestant’, ‘unionist’, and ‘loyalist’) are sometimes used interchangeably though they can also mean very different things in various contexts. They can also suggest, incorrectly, a level of communal unity which does not in fact exist. Undeniably, entire books can be written on the subtleties of Northern Irish nomenclature. I have attempted in this work to use expressions that most respect the context and views of the people described. Since this thesis focuses mainly on activists of a leftist and/or nationalist penchant, I have often adopted their own choice of words. The reader should therefore not interpret the use of names such as ‘Derry’ or ‘Six Counties’ (instead of ‘Londonderry’ and ‘Ulster’) as necessarily pejorative or politically motivated.

Overall, I have found the expression “Northern Irish” to be the most problematic; I have therefore restricted it to denote geography or civil status. Whenever possible, I have chosen expressions that seemed to me neutral, such as “the people of Northern Ireland” or the “Northern Ireland—and not ‘Northern Irish’—civil rights movement”.

The expressions ‘Stalinist’ and ‘Trotskyite’ are also widespread in the literature, but their usage is sometimes vague, inaccurate, or derogatory. I have usually avoided such labels and favoured expressions such as ‘red republican’ and ‘New Leftist’ which, I believe, are better suited to describe Northern Ireland’s ideological factions during the period here described.

This being said, it has taken me little time to realize that no matter what one writes on the subject of Northern Ireland, someone, somewhere is guaranteed to take exception. I therefore apologize for any inadvertent omission or indiscretion on my part which reflects a prejudice of any kind.

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America, and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice.

—Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.¹

We do not think it is wholly accidental that the events of last Autumn [1968] occurred at a time when throughout Europe, as well as in America, a wave of reaction against constituted authority in all its aspects, and in particular in the world of universities and colleges, was making itself manifest in violent protests, marches and street demonstrations of all kinds. The psychological effect of this example in other countries cannot be discounted.

—Lord John Cameron, D.S.C.²

¹ Martin Luther King, Jr.: "Letter from a Birmingham Jail," 16 April 1963, in Clayborn Carson, ed.: *The Autobiography of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, 1998, p.197-8.

² Government of Northern Ireland: *Disturbances in Northern Ireland: Report of the Commission Appointed by the Governor of Northern Ireland* (Cameron Report), 1969, p.55.

INTRODUCTION

IRISH CIVIL RIGHTS AND THE WORLD BEYOND

In May 1963, a group of Catholic housewives from the town of Dungannon launched Northern Ireland's first direct-action civil rights protest. This 'Homeless Citizens League' (HCL) accused the Protestant-controlled Dungannon Urban District Council of discriminatory practices in the allocation of public housing. After weeks of ineffectual pressure and picketing, thirty-seven families squatted illegally in a row of council houses slated for demolition. This initiative forced the Stormont provincial government to intervene, compelling the local council to provide accommodations for the 'Fairmount Park Squatters'.³

The illegal Dungannon squats of 1963 marked the embryonic beginnings of a Northern Ireland civil rights movement, not unlike the one occurring simultaneously in America. The inability to bring about reform through official channels would, over the following six years, cause the Northern Ireland civil rights movement to grow and include a wide array of nationalists, republicans, socialists, and liberals, all of whom disagreed with the regime's sectarian leanings and discriminatory practices. While the movement's leaders repeatedly declared that constitutional matters had no place in the civil rights struggle, the movement was itself composed largely of Catholics who opposed partition.

United in their struggle against Unionists and unionism, Northern Ireland's civil rights activists were nonetheless divided by a significant clash of ideas and methodology. Ideological fissures appeared very early on in the life of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement. They were deepened further by the tense international context of the late sixties and the interpretation its various leaders made of foreign events.

³ See *Dungannon Observer*, 31 August, 7 September, and 14 September 1963.

In the end, these ideological divisions sent the movement marching in divergent directions. This lack of unity facilitated the emergence of a loyalist backlash in the spring and summer of 1969, one that brought the civil rights movement to a screeching halt. The subsequent explosion of paramilitary violence, which pitted the newly constituted 'Provisional Irish Republican Army' against self-appointed defenders of the union with Great Britain, ensured the demise of civil rights protest in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Troubles that began in 1969 not only eclipsed the civil rights movement as a socio-political force, they have also largely displaced it as a subject of historical research. A large majority of historical inquiries into this period focus primarily, if not exclusively, on either the troubles or the age-old problem of sectarianism. Rarely does the civil rights movement receive attention as a subject in its own right; it has usually been approached with brevity and been depicted as one of many causes for the outbreak of the Troubles. It has also been evoked in a number of sociological studies as an example of socio-ethnic conflict. Such studies tend to focus narrowly on the domestic causes of Irish sectarianism and give little attention to the numerous international forces that shaped and affected the movement.

Most historical works on this subject have a narrow geographic scope that prevents us from fully appreciating the impact of international forces on the Northern Ireland of the sixties. This is due in part to the tendency to write 'national' or 'state' histories that chart the evolution of a single, geographically-contained society. In the case of Northern Ireland's divided society, where national loyalties differ significantly, local researchers often use the past as a pulpit from which to establish the legitimacy of one constitutional programme over another. Historical works on Northern Ireland thus often present the

past in the form of a sectarian epic—a centuries-long struggle to secure land, culture, and power. This often leads to a failure to look at the broader picture.

This thesis examines a recent period in Irish history through a wide geographic lens: it approaches the Northern Ireland of the sixties as a part of the global system, not as an isolated and insular society. The period studied is brief when compared to most works on Irish history; the years 1963 to 1969 were chosen because they represent the gestation period of civil rights ideologies, from the birth of civil rights protest until the explosion of urban violence that marked the fragmentation of the movement. These years are often called the O'Neill years, as they encapsulate the prime ministerial mandate of the moderate Unionist Captain Terrence O'Neill.

By analysing the speeches, writings, and interviews of former civil rights activists in light of the foreign events which coincided with the civil rights movement, we discover that the Northern Ireland civil rights movement was affected far more broadly and profoundly by the non-Irish world than has previously been suggested.

The first part of this thesis (chapters 1 and 2) establishes the historical background of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement. Chapter 1 contains an overview of its birth, growth and disintegration, as well as brief descriptions of the various organizations and people who came to dominate the civil rights landscape. Chapter 2 is an historiographical analysis of the civil rights historical literature. This chapter highlights four major problems that have led researchers to disregard, in whole or in part, important international aspects of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement.

The second part of this thesis (chapters 3, 4 and 5) is an investigation into the written record, showing more precisely *how* foreign events affected the ideologies of the civil

rights leadership. A close look at primary documents of the period (speeches, propaganda, interviews, and memoirs) also reveals the cleavages that divided the movement. These divisions were primarily ideological and are reflected in the division of this part into three chapters, each of which deals with one of the movement's three major schools of thought: constitutional nationalism, institutional Marxist republicanism (or 'red republicanism'), and 'New Left' revolutionary socialism. Each of these paradigms will be explained and discussed in the light of the international context from which it drew its inspiration.

Chapter 3 ('the Harp') is named after the traditional symbol of Irish nationalism, representing moderate middle-class nationalists who, in the mid-sixties, embarked upon a constitutional and social-democratic path to Irish reunification directly inspired by the American civil rights movement. Chapter 4 ('the Hammer') is named after the symbol of communist industrial might. This symbol represents the institutional Marxist (or 'Stalinist') doctrine of the 'official' republican movement and of the trade-union movement, banded together against the encroachment of international corporate interests in Ireland. Chapter 5 ('the Plough') is named after the preferred symbol of the revolutionary Irish New Left, the starry plough flag. This community was composed mostly of young socialist radicals deeply committed to the eradication of sectarianism in Ireland. They were profoundly inspired by the wave of student protest occurring simultaneously in numerous cities and university campuses around the world.

CHAPTER 1

FROM FAIRMOUNT PARK TO THE BOGSIDE (1963-1969)

Accounts of the civil rights movement which begin with 5 October 1968 or later dates are inadequate. After that date we are dealing with a movement that was slithering rapidly to the crisis of August 1969 [...] What has to be explained is not the consequences of the events in Derry on 5 October 1968, but how the demonstrators came to be there in the first place.⁴

I. A PROTESTANT STATE FOR A PROTESTANT PEOPLE

The domestic causes of civil rights discontent were as old as the state itself. From the birth of the Northern Ireland statelet in 1920 until the outbreak of the troubles in 1969, representatives of the Catholic minority never fully recognized the legitimacy of the Northern Irish government or the arbitrarily drawn border that divided them from the Catholic majority to the south. Catholicism and nationalism thus became synonymous in the early days of partition.⁵ Leaders of the northern minority thus fostered the creation of a separate and quasi-autonomous Catholic system of education, health care, and social assistance, for which they were considered seditious by the Unionist establishment. Political parties such as Sinn Féin and the Nationalist Party (NP) made partition their principal concern.⁶ Though the constitutionally neutral Northern Ireland Labour Party

⁴ Bob Purdie: *Politics in the Streets* (1990), p.4.

⁵ Because of the tight relationship that exists in Northern Ireland between religious identities and constitutional positions, the denominational labels 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' often imply a political ideology as well (i.e.: 'nationalist' and 'unionist', respectively).

⁶ Sinn Féin ("Ourselves Alone") was until recently an abstentionist republican party affiliated to the Irish Republican Army (IRA) and committed to Irish reunification through the force of arms. Because of its illegal status under Northern Irish law, this party usually pitched independent republican candidates in Westminster elections, leaving the Nationalist Party to contest seats in Stormont. The NP, on the other hand, was a loose confederation of Catholic conservatives with close ties to the Ancient Order of Hibernians. It held an ambiguous constitutional position, serving in the Stormont parliament but never as the official opposition—until the emergence of the civil rights movement led it to do so in 1965. Its support base was the strongly Catholic and rural west. It was weakest in Belfast where urban Catholics were more likely to support abstentionist (i.e.: republican) and socialist candidates. See Erhard Rumpff and A.C. Hepburn: *Nationalism and Socialism in Twentieth-Century Ireland* (1977), p.173.

(NILP) gained some popularity among urban Catholic voters in the early sixties, it failed to become a significant third force in Stormont. Most Northern Catholics continued to abstain from all forms of public service well into the nineteen sixties.

The widespread belief among the minority that Northern Ireland was a Protestant state for a Protestant people was not totally unjustified. There had existed among 'loyal' Protestants since the Elizabethan Plantation of the seventeenth century the popular belief that Catholics were 'disloyal' to the crown and hence not to be entrusted with positions of power. Such fears gave rise to elaborate historical myths (both Catholic and Protestant) and to a 'siege mentality' among Protestant unionists that helped justify Ulster's skewed voting system, the gerrymandering of electoral boundaries, and economic policies which often favoured Protestants over Catholics. While discrimination was officially illegal, it was nonetheless practiced at the highest levels. James Craig, Northern Ireland's first prime minister (1921-1940), abolished proportional representation and rearranged the electoral structures of the state to consolidate the power of the Unionists. His successor Basil Brooke (1943 -1963), who "seemed incapable of recognizing the benefits of reconciling any of the minority to the regime,"⁷ prided himself on the fact that his business hired no Catholics. In theory, Northern Ireland respected the legal and constitutional rights of all British citizens equally, but the reality was otherwise:

The proud promise of a 'Protestant Parliament for a Protestant People' was effectively fulfilled through the continued stranglehold of the exclusively Protestant Unionist Party in the parliament of Stormont. The system of local government was also so organised as to guarantee the dominance of the Unionists even in areas where they were outnumbered. And the fundamental legal rights of all citizens against arbitrary arrest and imprisonment were effectively annulled by the provisions of the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act of 1922, which was re-enacted from year to year until 1933 when it was made permanent. The powers of arrest and detention under the Special Powers Act [...] were not

⁷ Jonathan Bardon: *A History of Ulster*, revised edition (2001), p.611.

formally directed against Roman Catholics and Republicans, but it was common knowledge that it was against them and them alone that it was directed and used.⁸

Even in the early sixties, relations between Catholics and Protestants were subject to reciprocal fears and numerous social and political conventions that, as Thomas Hennessey suggests, often precluded healthy dialogue from ever taking place:

Northern Ireland's communal divisions persisted in a form of cold war. Much of the antagonism between the two communities was based on preconceived notions of the other. [...] Throughout the nineteen-fifties and into the early sixties, Northern Ireland remained a fundamentally divided and sectarian society. Differences between the two communities pervaded all aspects of society. There was a marked difference in the economic status of the two communities. [...] Any attempt to change or challenge the foundations of these divisions could destabilize the very basis on which the citizens of Northern Ireland's polarized community could live in relative peace with one another.⁹

Community relations were also sporadically embittered by republican insurrections. An armed border campaign, lasting from 1956 to 1962, raised unionist fears in the years that followed of an imminent republican uprising. This failed attempt at 'driving out the British' had been an ill-planned series of raids on RUC and B-Special targets¹⁰ which showed, once again, the Dublin-based IRA's incomprehension of Northern Ireland society and its inability to rally mass support. The border campaign was for the most part counterproductive: it reinforced unionist fears and further marginalised the Catholic minority in the North.¹¹ Catholics had also shown little enthusiasm for the campaign. Republican fervour was, it would seem, on the wane for good.

At the same time, a shift towards social-democratic values was taking place among Northern Catholics. The implementation of the British welfare state system during the

⁸ Kevin Boyle, Tom Hadden and Paddy Hillyard: *Law and State: the Case of Northern Ireland* (1975), p.6-7.

⁹ Thomas Hennessey: *A History of Northern Ireland* (1997), p.110, 115, 120.

¹⁰ The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) was the official police force of Northern Ireland, while the Special Constabulary (or B-Specials) was a part-time, auxiliary force. Both organisations were almost exclusively Protestant and unionist in composition and often criticized by nationalists for their partisan leanings.

¹¹ Denis B. Barritt and Charles F. Carter: *The Northern Ireland Problem: A Study in Group Relations*, 2nd edition (1972), p.ix.

postwar years dramatically improved the educational and economic standards of Northern Irish inhabitants, especially Catholics. This led to a “tendency for Catholics to focus more on their position as citizens of Northern Ireland,” noted James Loughlin, rather than seeing themselves as Irish Catholics in exile.¹² The 1944 Butler Education Act allowed a first generation of working class Catholics to attend collegiate institutions such as Queen’s University, Belfast (QUB), where they brushed elbows with Protestants on a daily basis.¹³ Better education, employment and social mobility did give Northern Catholics a greater stake in the system, but such things also made economic disparities between Catholics and Protestants (and the areas where each community was concentrated) all the more apparent. Unfortunately, notes Loughlin, “social advances of the period were not accompanied by significant economic regeneration.”¹⁴ This explains in part why the 1963 nomination of Captain Terrence O’Neill to the post of Northern Ireland Prime Minister raised the political expectations of the Northern Catholic electorate. O’Neill, writes Purdie, had “a style and rhetoric which made it appear as if Northern Ireland was in the rapids of change and that this change would bring improved material prosperity and communal reconciliation.”¹⁵

A well-travelled and gentrified Anglican, O’Neill freely expounded the rhetoric of liberal democracy, unlike his predecessors. While he was a proponent of industrial development and improved collective wealth, he sounded more like a reformer than he actually was. Rapid industrialization and job creation, he believed, could solve most of

¹² James Loughlin: *The Ulster Question Since 1945* (1998), p.25.

¹³ The 1944 Butler Act came into force in Northern Ireland in 1947. This first generation of working class Catholics to attend Queen’s University for free included several future civil rights activists: Eamonn McCann, Austin Currie, Ciaran McKeown, Michael Farrell, Kevin Boyle, Cyril Toman and Bernadette Devlin, to name but a few.

¹⁴ Loughlin: *The Ulster Question*, p.26.

¹⁵ Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.14.

Northern Ireland's sectarian problems by alleviating the worst extremes of poverty. His was an inclusive and economic doctrine of unionism, expressed through his patronizing belief that Catholics, if given a chance to "live like Protestants"—by obtaining more jobs, breeding fewer children, and living in better neighbourhoods—would logically seek greater integration within Ulster and support the Unionist Party.¹⁶ O'Neill's vision was severely out of touch with the pulse of the minority. He failed to recognize that the grievances of poor Catholics were of a legal and political nature, and that improving the general wealth of the country did not necessarily translate into improved minority rights. O'Neill "tried to meet a political problem with an economic solution," wrote Richard Rose. As a result, "the trouble [was] diagnosed as 'something wrong' with the disaffected."¹⁷ In his first five years in office, O'Neill attempted to build bridges with the Catholic community by engaging in sporadic acts of goodwill. This openness, however, was never followed-up with tangible reforms—in part because he lived in chronic apprehension of a cabinet revolt.¹⁸

In 1965, O'Neill initiated a surprise meeting with the Irish Republic's Taoiseach,¹⁹ Sean Lemass—the first meeting of this kind to occur since partition. The meeting only managed to infuriate reactionary Unionists and failed to convince most nationalists that it was in any way connected to their own interests. Furthermore, because many of his vast

¹⁶ Reprinted in Hennessey : *A History of Northern Ireland*, p. 162.

¹⁷ Richard Rose: *Governing Without Consensus* (1971), p.409-10. "In the 'prosperity' game," he continues sardonically, "everyone can win cash prizes, even if their sum political gain is nil."

¹⁸ Hence, O'Neill began the construction of a new industrial town (Craigavon) in the eastern Protestant heartland rather than in the ailing west; he built a new university in Protestant Coleraine instead of Derry where the necessary infrastructure already existed; he phased out the railway link between Belfast and the west; and he initiated a number of industrial and housing developments which favoured unionist areas. See Loughlin, *The Ulster Question*, p.27-8; see also Robert D. Osbourne's "Political Process and Behaviour" (Chapter 7), in Frederick W. Boal and J. Neville H. Douglas, eds.: *Integration and Division: Geographical Perspectives on the Northern Ireland Problem* (1982), p.172-176.

¹⁹ 'Taoiseach' is the official title of the first minister of the Republic of Ireland.

economic projects were aimed at checking the growth of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP)—the only party with the potential to dethrone the Unionists with support across sectarian lines—O’Neill smothered the only moderate parliamentary force capable of speaking for the vocal minority and to bring about fair civil rights legislation. “With its decline,” wrote Loughling, “the last parliamentary restraint on the development of street politics was removed.”²⁰ O’Neill’s last two years in office would find him incapable of addressing Catholic grievances without unleashing a political storm.

O’Neill was also out of touch with the fundamentalist grass-roots of his own party, many of whom turned against him to follow Ian Paisley, a rambunctious and virulently anti-Catholic Presbyterian cleric.²¹ Though he enjoyed a resounding victory at the polls in 1965, “O’Neill eventually created intense frustration within the minority by his inability to deliver thoroughgoing reform, while more and more loyalists were convinced that he was conceding too much.”²²

II. PAMPHLETS AND POLITICS I: THE CAMPAIGN FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE

The first civil rights protest in Northern Ireland was the Dungannon housing protest in the summer of 1963. The Homeless Citizens’ League (HCL) initiative was mostly the work of young, low-income Catholic housewives who had been denied public housing by the gerrymandered, Unionist-controlled local council. The HCL picketing protests and illegal squat brought to public attention the attempts of the local Unionist elite to use public housing allocation to engineer the composition of electoral districts, thus

²⁰ Loughlin: *The Ulster Question*, p.33-34.

²¹ A large loyalist subculture emerged behind Paisley, drawing its strength from rural conservatives, working class loyalists, and fundamentalist Presbyterians hardened against O’Neill’s ‘liberal’ ideas and aristocratic style. See Peter Taylor: *Loyalists*, 1999.

²² Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, p.623.

perpetuating their own minority power.²³ The intimate relationship between housing discrimination, the gerrymandering of electoral districts, and the economic stratification of Northern Ireland's religious communities—whether true or perceived—became the primary target of the early civil rights movement.

Irregularities in public housing allocation, however, were in no way a recent phenomenon nor were they as widespread as claimed by civil rights activists. “The overall record on housing in Northern Ireland,” writes Purdie, “was creditable.”²⁴ It was a long-ingrained practice that also occurred in Nationalist-controlled towns such as Newry. Why then did it not lead to mass demonstrations and demands for civil right before 1963? It is perhaps no accident that these events occurred simultaneously with those of the African-American civil rights movement. “The HCL arose,” writes Purdie, “at a time when the Black civil rights movement in the United States was headline news around the world.”²⁵ A number of Catholics thus discovered, mainly through the media, that using the non-violent direct-action tactics, as in the American Deep South, offered a better chance to change the system than did abstention or armed rebellion.

When the HCL protestors nominated Patricia McCluskey as its chairwoman, they mobilized a respected, articulate, educated and socially proactive woman—along with her husband Conn, a doctor and proponent of social democracy—to the forefront of the fledgling campaign. The McCluskeys were soon to become a major pillar of civil rights activism. After the Dungannon housing campaign, they went on to form the Campaign

²³ The temptation to manipulate electoral districts was, wrote Bob Purdie, “particularly intense where there was a real prospect of shifting the local balance of power [...] where the two sides were evenly balanced numerically or where a Unionist minority held power because of the electoral system.” This was particularly the case in Dungannon and in Derry, where “any major expansion of housing could bring about a shift in the political balance of the council.” Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.86-87.

²⁴ Ibid. p.83

²⁵ Ibid. p.92

for Social Justice (CSJ), a pamphleteering society committed to the eradication of sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

The McCluskeys were a remarkable and unlikely source of political protest. They were middle-aged, financially secure, and had no history of such activities. Their ideology was a moderate mixture of nationalism and socialism that could not be considered radical by any means. The CSJ had no official constitutional agenda; it focused on raising public awareness at home and abroad concerning glaring cases of discrimination perpetrated by Unionist authorities.

From 1963 to 1967, the CSJ petitioned both government and the courts in a manner reminiscent of the American NAACP. Their calls for political reforms were rebuffed, being told that existing legislation was sufficient to prosecute such cases. They were subsequently denied legal aid and told by legal authorities to refer their cases to the political authorities. British Prime Minister Alec Douglas Home himself sent the ball back to the courts in March 1964, and the CSJ's legal campaign ended in limbo.²⁶ Unlike their African-American counterparts, notes Richard Rose, Northern Ireland's Catholics soon realised appealing to local courts on matters of civil liberties was a rather expensive *cul-de-sac*:

Both Southern blacks and Ulster Catholics formally had recourse to the courts, [but] courts tended to construe constitutionally conferred rights narrowly. [...In the U.K.,] Parliament rather than the courts is the ultimate arbiter. Protestants were at one with Catholics in being denied a judicial forum to advance political claims. They differed, in that Catholics were more likely to have grievances.²⁷

²⁶ "Section 5 of the [Government of Ireland] Act," wrote the Prime Minister's office to the CSJ, "already prohibits the enactment by the Parliament of Northern Ireland of laws interfering with religious equality, and the Prime Minister sees no reason for asking the United Kingdom Parliament to legislate further on this matter." Reprinted in CSJ: *Northern Ireland: Why Justice Cannot be Done—The Douglas Home Correspondence* (1964).

²⁷ Richard Rose: "On the Priorities of Citizenship in the Deep South and Northern Ireland," *The Journal of Politics*, Volume 38, Number 2 (May 1976), p.266.

The CSJ's numerous failures only led to a stronger resolve. It pressured the British government to force the Unionists to enact reforms as was its mandate under the Government of Ireland Act (1920).²⁸ While the Conservative Alec Douglas Home government rebuffed the CSJ request once more in June 1964,²⁹ Labour leader and future prime minister Harold Wilson expressed his support for the CSJ during the 1964 election campaign.³⁰ Once elected with a very thin majority, however, Wilson chose instead to adopt the road of quiet diplomacy with O'Neill.³¹ The CSJ later took its case to the European Commission on Human Rights, but was unable to sustain the cost and the effort required to pursue the inquiry to its end.³² The CSJ informed the general public through the compilation and publication of discrimination statistics, also sending its newsletters to Stormont and Westminster MPs. Unfortunately, no member of the Wilson government wished to defy the unwritten convention of leaving Northern Ireland's affairs out of the Westminster Parliament.

²⁸ The Government of Ireland Act (1920), section 75, states: "The supreme authority of the Parliament of the United Kingdom shall remain unaffected and undiminished over all persons, matters and things in Ireland and every part thereof." (Reprinted in John Magee, ed.: *Northern Ireland: Crisis and Conflict*, 1974, p.54). However, since many British governments depended on Unionist support in Parliament, there existed an unwritten convention not to discuss matters relating to Stormont's jurisdiction in Westminster. This convention proved exceedingly frustrating to MPs supportive of civil rights in Northern Ireland.

²⁹ The Government of Ireland Act afforded such powers to *Parliament*, wrote the Prime Minister's Office to the CSJ on 3 September 1964, but it did not give the *government* of the United Kingdom such powers. CSJ: *Why Justice Cannot be Done* (1964).

³⁰ A month before taking office, Wilson promised the CSJ, "I agree with you as to the importance of the issues with which your campaign is concerned and can assure you that a Labour government would do everything in its power to see that infringements of justice to which you are so rightly drawing attention are effectively dealt with." *Belfast Newsletter*, 5 October 1964; Reprinted in Jonathan Moore: "The Labour Party and Northern Ireland in the 1960s," in Eamonn Hughes, ed.: *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland 1960-1990* (1993), p.71.

³¹ Wilson depended on support from Unionist backbenchers at Westminster and feared O'Neill might be replaced by a less amenable Unionist. Wilson therefore gave Stormont full discretion to deal with civil rights, until the violent events of August 1968 forced him to intervene directly. "Captain O'Neill had already made more progress in a matter of two or three years in attacking problems of discrimination and human rights than all his Stormont predecessors," wrote Wilson, "there was no doubt about his courage and resolve." See Harold Wilson: *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (1971), p.270-1.

³² The court did find their grievances valid, but in any event, the British government never responded to the invitation to present its rebuttal. See Andrew J. Wilson: "The American Congress for Irish Freedom and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-70," in *Eire-Ireland*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1994), p.61.

III. PAMPHLETS AND POLITICS II: THE PARLIAMENTARY FRONT

In the mid-sixties, the Nationalist Party was in a state of crisis. Catholics were increasingly turning to other political formations such as Labour (NILP), the socialist Republican Labour Party (RLP)—a quasi-one man (Gerry Fitt) campaign for urban poverty relief—and the National Democratic Party (NDP), a short-lived nationalist alternative with a progressive platform. These parties offered new options to the Catholic minority, particularly to new, educated voters of the baby-boom generation for whom traditional ideologies seemed hopelessly outdated.

In 1965, Nationalist leader Eddie McAteer accepted to let his party assume the role of official opposition in Stormont—an office which the NP had spurned for years to maintain its ambiguous constitutional position³³—but this greater participation in public affairs came too late and earned it few new supporters. McAteer was to show some support for the civil rights cause but he would nonetheless remain an outsider to the movement; his conservative nationalism clashed too strongly with the progressive and socialist mindset of its leaders.

Meanwhile, the CSJ forged links with a number of backbencher MPs in Westminster, especially Paul Rose, an English Labourite. Rose helped found the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster (CDU), an association of rank-and-file Labour MPs interested in Northern Ireland affairs. Rose and the CDU became the sounding board of the CSJ in Westminster throughout the civil rights campaign, but the parliamentary convention that prevented Northern Ireland issues from being discussed in the House greatly reduced the

³³ Purdie highlights the contradictory nature of the NP's political platform: "they rejected the legitimacy of the Northern Ireland constitution [while] they acquiesced and worked within it. But the two principles were not held together in the kind of intellectual tension which can produce creative politics, but by the absence of a creative faculty." Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.49.

CDU's efficiency. Subsequently, Rose and the CDU, along with Belfast MP Gerry Fitt—the sole non-Unionist Westminster MP from Northern Ireland—played a large role in getting the mass movement of 1968-69 started.

Gerry Fitt was the most prominent nationalist politician in Northern Ireland. He was independent-minded, socialist, constitutionally proactive, moderate, and a staunch defender of the urban poor. While calling himself a republican, he had no links to the republican movement. He also broke with the republican tradition of parliamentary abstention, having won seats in both Stormont (1958) and Westminster (1966).³⁴ Fitt often criticized Prime Minister Wilson over civil rights issues in Northern Ireland. He called on numerous occasions for Westminster's direct intervention in the matter. If Wilson was willing to campaign against the institutionalisation of racism in distant Rhodesia, then why, asked Fitt, did the PM not do so in nearby Northern Ireland?³⁵ Though Fitt's requests were largely ignored by Wilson, his no-nonsense populist style gave him wide appeal all across Northern Ireland. He participated in numerous civil rights protests, spoke at its rallies, and was a prominent spokesman for the movement through the media.

Other politicians who pushed the civil rights cause forward were Joe McCann, leader of the short-lived National Democratic Party (NDP); Sheilagh Murnaghan, a Stormont Liberal MP; and especially Austin Currie, an impulsive young Nationalist MP from Co. Tyrone. With closer ties to Gerry Fitt and the McCluskeys than to his own party, Currie

³⁴ Fitt's Dock riding was a mixed, industrial working-class district of Belfast. After the civil rights movement, he went on to found the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) with a number of other moderate constitutional nationalists.

³⁵ "Fitt Will Think of Quitting if Efforts Fail at Westminster," *Irish Weekly*, 4 March 1967. See also Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.63. On Wilson's negotiations with Ian Smith of Rhodesia, see Wilson's Memoirs: *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record*.

had been a supporter of the American civil rights movement since his recent university days at Queen's University. He held its non-violent direct-action tactics in high esteem. "Media comparisons between the condition of black people in the USA and 'Ireland's white negroes'," wrote Currie in his memoirs, "struck a responsive chord."³⁶ He also marked his public addresses with many references to racial repression in Rhodesia and South Africa, as well as Soviet belligerence in Berlin and Czechoslovakia.³⁷ Inspired by the tactics of the American civil rights movement, Currie joined a family of illegal squatters at Caledon, Co. Tyrone, in June 1968. The media attention he received helped launch the province's first massive civil rights march in August of the same year.³⁸ This marked a clear transition in the civil rights struggle from the Parliamentary arena to street politics.

IV. REPUBLICANS, COMMUNISTS, AND THE NORTHERN IRELAND CIVIL RIGHTS ASSOCIATION

The closure of constitutional and legal channels experienced by the moderate CSJ and its parliamentary allies opened the door to the emergence of a more eclectic—and more radical—civil rights coalition. Three events helped bring this about. First, a 1962 12,000-strong workers' march in Belfast had brought Nationalist and Labour leaders together for the first time to denounce the Unionist government of Basil Brooke for its lack of action in countering the rise of unemployment. Then, in 1964, the campaign for a new university in Derry ended in bitter disappointment for Derry's merchant and

³⁶ Austin Currie: *All Hell Will Break Loose* (2004), p.99.

³⁷ See for example "Social Justice [sic] Battle Will Continue," *Irish News*, 24 June 1968.

³⁸ The squat at No.9 Kinnard Park, Caledon (near Dungannon), was done to protest the allocation of a council house to an out-of-town and unmarried 19 year-old woman (the secretary of a Unionist councillor's lawyer, himself a Unionist party candidate) while several local Catholic families had been waiting much longer for public accommodations. See Dominick J. Coyle: *Minorities in Revolt* (1983), p.51; and Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.135.

intellectual middle class. Many of these, like John Hume and Ivan Cooper, were proponents of a non-sectarian and social-democratic form of constitutional nationalism open to Catholics and Protestants alike. This brief alliance laid the groundwork for the future creation of the Derry Citizens Action Committee (DCAC), a leading and effective civil rights organization. Finally, the exaggerated reaction of prominent loyalists against republican celebrations held in 1966 and 1967 generated unprecedented solidarity among the opponents of the Unionist regime—nationalist, republican, and socialist alike. In addition to these three factors, growing international concern over human rights and decolonization—widely publicised by the Northern Ireland media³⁹—had by the winter of 1966-67 made the transition to mass protest almost unavoidable.

The stage was thus set for the creation of a broad movement that comprised all opponents of the Unionist regime, even those on the fringe of popular opinion. Foremost among these was the republican movement⁴⁰ and the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI),⁴¹ both of which played an important role in the creation and administration of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), the movement's new flagship.

The failed border campaign of 1956-62 had left the republican movement low on resources and bitterly divided. It had also further alienated the IRA and Sinn Féin from the Catholic community in the North which was not, at the time, overly supportive of revolutionary action.⁴² Several members of the old guard were forced out of Sinn Féin/IRA in late 1962, the border campaign was brought to a close with an order to dump

³⁹ See Chapters 3 to 5.

⁴⁰ Coming under the broad umbrella of the Irish Republican Army (IRA), the republican movement included Sinn Féin—its political wing—and a number of clubs and think-tanks across the North and South of Ireland. The IRA chief of staff was the official overseeing authority of the movement.

⁴¹ The CPI, an outgrowth of the Revolutionary Workers' Groups (the Communist Party of the Irish Republic), was by 1967 wholly autonomous and had a small, mostly Protestant base in Belfast.

⁴² See Richard Rose's loyalty survey in Rose: *Governing Without Concensus* (1971).

arms, and Cathal Goulding was installed as the new IRA Chief of Staff. “The general demoralization was such that no-one else wanted the job,” writes Henry Patterson.⁴³ Goulding believed, nonetheless, that his nomination was a mandate for new ideas and tactics.

Imprisoned in England from 1956 to 1961, Goulding was untainted by the recent border campaign. He was also a proponent of Marxist economic principles and the elaboration of a stage-by-stage path to Irish unification through working class agitation, not armed insurrection. Goulding immediately sought closer relations with organized labour in the North, as well as an end to Sinn Féin’s policy of abstention. He believed the IRA’s role should be to mobilize the working-class, which would itself challenge and topple the sectarian framework that kept Ireland’s two states divided.

While in England, Goulding had befriended several Marxists through the Connolly Association.⁴⁴ He was especially influenced by Desmond Greaves, the editor of the *Irish Democrat*; Anthony Coughlan, a constitutional republican; and Roy Johnston, who was to become one of his closest advisors. Johnston was a Dublin-born middle-class Protestant with a doctorate in computer science from Trinity University. He was sympathetic to the republican cause and had been a member of both British and Irish communist parties. As a civilian advisor to the IRA, Johnston elaborated its new education programme; it included the creation of republican think-tanks throughout the island that would disseminate republican ideas and build a republican presence in local community organisations. It was for this reason that the Wolfe Tone Societies (WTS)

⁴³ Henry Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion* (1989), p.85.

⁴⁴ The Connolly Association was a London-based Marxist think-tank made up of Irish expatriates faithful to the socialist teachings of James Connolly, the Irish revolutionary executed for his role in the 1916 Easter Rising in Dublin. It was not associated with the republican movement in Ireland.

were created in 1963.⁴⁵ Growing popular demands for civil rights led the WTS to initiate, in the winter of 1966-67, the creation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA).⁴⁶ The new organisation would allow the republican movement, it was believed, to increase its visibility and political influence in the North, and to redirect the structure of Northern Ireland politics along an economic (left-right) rather than a sectarian (Catholic-Protestant) axis.

Members of the Communist Party played a very important role in NICRA. They were experienced propagandists, had solid roots in the world of organized labour, and were highly dedicated to ending sectarianism. Despite the allegations of Bill Craig and Ian Paisley, the communists of NICRA—many of whom were women—were definitely not proponents of conspiracy. They exerted, in fact, a moderating influence on the movement. Betty Sinclair, Anne Hope, and Edwina Stewart for instance, also inaugurated a new leading role for women in Northern politics. Their Protestant backgrounds also helped give the association a distinctly non-confessional flavour.⁴⁷

NICRA's original mandate was to act as a petitioning body along the lines of the British National Council for Civil Liberties. Though NICRA's name soon became synonymous with marches and public protests, these were largely the fruit of local initiatives. It was usually with great caution that the NICRA executive found itself

⁴⁵ The Wolfe Tone Societies played an important role in the organisation of republican festivities, such as the 1963 bicentenary commemoration of the birth of the republican hero Wolfe Tone, and the 1966 fifty-year anniversary of the Easter Rising in Dublin.

⁴⁶ NICRA's constitution emphasized its non-sectarian vocation. Nonetheless, few unionists joined, and only one occupied (and only temporarily) a position on its executive committee. The principal organisations from which NICRA drew its membership were: The Wolfe Tone Society, the Campaign for Social Justice, the National Democratic Party, the Communist Party of Ireland, the Northern Ireland Labour Party, the Belfast Trades Council, the Draughtsmen and Allied Technicians' Association, the Ulster Labour Party, and (but not before 1969) the Peoples' Democracy and Young Socialist Alliance.

⁴⁷ See Kevin Boyle, Interview with W.H. Van Voris (1972), in Van Voris: *Violence in Ulster*, p.155.

supporting civil rights marches, sit-ins, and rallies. This was primarily the work of young, non-aligned radicals in Derry and Belfast.

V. POLITICS IN THE STREETS

Public processions have been a regular occurrence in Northern Ireland for centuries. The American civil rights example, however, triggered a new perspective on public marches among Northern Ireland's civil rights proponents. While marches in Ulster had for ages been used by both Protestant and Catholic societies to support sectarian territorial claims,⁴⁸ the organizers of the first civil rights march in Northern Ireland had every intention of using marches to defy the sectarian marching tradition, the geographical segregation of Ulster's communities, and the Unionist Party.

Austin Currie's illegal squat at Caledon in June 1968 brought increased media attention to the cause of civil rights. He firmly believed that an American-style civil rights march could provide the media coverage necessary to compel Unionist and British governments to enact anti-discriminatory reforms. Currie therefore exhorted the McCluskeys and the CSJ, as well as other leading members of NICRA, to take advantage of the moment and launch a civil-rights march.

On 24 August, upwards of 5000⁴⁹ marchers were brought together by the CSJ and NICRA in Currie's hometown of Coalisland, Co. Tyrone. They then made their way to Dungannon's market square where they were to congregate for a rally, but a loyalist counter-demonstration, led by Ian Paisley, mobilized first on Dungannon square. Police

⁴⁸ See works by Dominic Bryan: *Orange Parades: the Politics of Ritual, Tradition, and Control* (2000); T.G. Fraser, ed.: *The Irish Parading Tradition: Following the Drum* (2000); and Neil Jarman: *Material Conflicts: Parades and Visual Displays in Northern Ireland* (1997).

⁴⁹ The number of protestors varies from source to source. This figure comes from the *Irish News*, 26 August 1968.

tried to reroute the civil rights marchers and a minor scuffle ensued. Despite the taunting of loyalists and a few pro-civil rights hotheads bent on provocation, the march ended peacefully and was considered a success. However, it did not attract widespread attention from the media; the important television coverage Currie and the NICRA leadership had anticipated focused instead on the concurrent Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.⁵⁰ Consequently, numerous speakers expressed their solidarity with the freedom-loving Czechs,⁵¹ and the event helped foster the belief that Northern Ireland Catholics were subject to the same form of tyrannical persecution as were the people of Prague. The Coalisland-to-Dungannon march also triggered calls for more civil rights marches.

During the preceding weeks, a group of young militants calling themselves the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) was pursuing its own version of civil rights activism in a city where gerrymandering and housing discrimination were glaring facts of everyday life. Radical young republicans and socialists composed the core of this organisation, many of whom had grown up in the despondent Bogside neighbourhood—a veritable Catholic ghetto. Its ring-leaders were Eamonn McCann (a Labour party member and hardboiled Marxist), and Eamonn Melaugh and Finnbar O’Doherty (two leading members of the Derry Young Republicans Association). The DHAC was a small but radical band of activists willing to break the law to defend their cause.⁵² In the fall of 1968, the DHAC invited NICRA to sponsor a civil rights march through Derry. The march was slated to go through Unionist neighbourhoods and the highly symbolic city

⁵⁰ “The International press corps we had hoped to come to Tyrone had moved to Prague,” Austin Currie, interviewed in *Irish News Souvenir Supplement*, 5 October 1998, p.16.

⁵¹ See for instance reports on Gerry Fitt’s 24 August speech in the *Irish News*, 26 August 1968.

⁵² Blocking traffic with the caravans of homeless families was one notable weapon in the DHAC arsenal.

centre.⁵³ Members of the NICRA executive unwittingly accepted the proposed route, being unfamiliar with the socio-political layout of the city. The march was immediately banned by the Minister of Home Affairs, William Craig. Leading members of NICRA—including McCluskey and Sinclair—proposed postponing it. The DHAC leadership refused, and NICRA, after much deliberation, finally agreed to sponsor the march.⁵⁴

On 5 October 1968, a crowd of two to four hundred anti-unionist activists gathered in Derry's Waterside ward—a rather poor showing compared to the thousands-strong Coalisland-to-Dungannon march six weeks before.⁵⁵ The Derry march had been poorly organized and comprised a large cluster of local radicals seeking to provoke a police reaction;⁵⁶ but it was also attended by many 'respectable' opponents of the Unionist regime, such as Eddie McAteer (NP), Gerry Fitt (RLP) and three visiting Westminster

⁵³ Derry's city center, or 'diamond', is a walled fortress, symbolic to loyalists for the historical siege laid there in 1689 by the deposed Catholic King of Britain, James II, against Protestant settlers loyal to his rival, William III of Orange. Every summer on 12 August, the Apprentice Boys of Londonderry, a loyalist fraternity, marches around the city walls of Londonderry to celebrate the victory of the Protestant King over the invading Catholic Jacobites. See Ruth Dudley Edwards: *The Faithful Tribe* (2000), p.187-99.

⁵⁴ A loyalist Apprentice Boys march had been announced for the same time and place, which gave Bill Craig sufficient reason to ban both marches. The Apprentice Boys march was most probably a loyalist counter-measure, as it did not fall within the regular marching season and was only announced after advertisements for the civil rights march had been posted.

⁵⁵ There is great variation in the literature as to the exact turnout of the 5 October march. Some estimate as many as 4000 protestors. The figure used here is that of Eamonn McCann, himself a principal organizer of the 5 October march. He estimated that 250 adult protestors gathered at the Waterside train station in *Irish Times*, 6 October 1971. The figure is increased to 400 (with local youths?) in *War and an Irish Town*. In any case, the total number of marchers was significantly smaller than on 24 August. "Without the ban," he wrote, "the turnout would have been pathetic indeed." McCann: *War and an Irish Town* (1974), p. 41.

⁵⁶ Purdie holds that the Derry marchers were caught fully unaware by the police charge (Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p. 155). Ample evidence suggests, however, that numerous marchers were bent on provocation. Finnbar O'Doherty, for one, came expecting violence: "I clutched a crash helmet in a plastic bag to the chosen assembly point, Waterside railway station. I was somewhat surprised that no one else had acted similarly." (In *Irish News: Souvenir Supplement*, "Some Fine Day: Civil Rights 30 Years On," 5 October 1998.) Eamonn McCann adds: "our conscious, if unspoken, strategy was to provoke the police into over-reaction and thus spark off mass reaction against the authorities." (McCann: *War and an Irish Town*, p.35) Newspapers reported that protestors chanting 'Sieg Heil,' and 'A Dhia, Saor Eire', "threw their placards over the heads of those in front of them and at the police" prior to the baton charge. See "Police and People Clash in Derry," *Irish Times*, 7 October 1968 and "Police in Derry Use Batons Freely," *Irish News*, 5 December 1968.

Labour MPs. Despite the poor turnout it was, unlike the previous march, a significant media event.

The Derry march quickly deteriorated into a violent confrontation between the police and marchers. Local youths entered the fray later in the day.⁵⁷ Gerry Fitt MP and Fred Heatley (NICRA) were among the first protestors to be batoned by a two-fronted police attack. Fitt's bloodied face appeared in several newspapers over the following days. The shocking images of the RUC charging unarmed protesters with batons and water canons was broadcast internationally, causing widespread indignation. Support for the Northern Ireland civil rights movement flared across Northern Ireland, the Irish Republic, Britain,⁵⁸ and even in the United States.⁵⁹ Local NICRA branches suddenly took shape all across Northern Ireland. Seemingly overnight, the isolated city of Derry had become a part of the world stage.

In Belfast, and particularly at Queen's University where events in Paris and Chicago had aroused much interest,⁶⁰ the violence of 5 October in Derry moved a large number of current and former students to form the Joint Student Action Committee for Civil Rights—which soon changed its name to People's Democracy.⁶¹ The PD initiated

⁵⁷ "The original confrontation between marchers and police had given way to a general battle between the police and young residents of the Bogside, most of whom had taken no part in the march." Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.143.

⁵⁸ On Sunday 6 October, both the Connolly Association and the London section of the Irish republican movement took to the streets at Stormont's Ulster office and at Downing Street, respectively. "Derry Rocked by Further Riots and Baton Charges," *Irish News*, 7 October 1968.

⁵⁹ See Andrew J. Wilson, "The American Congress for Irish Freedom and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-70," *Eire-Ireland*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1994). The American connection will be discussed further in the following chapters.

⁶⁰ The 1968 Paris 'May Days' saw student radicals, led by Daniel Cohn-Bendit, occupy the campuses of the Sorbonne and Nanterre Universities and clash violently with police. In August, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) took Chicago by storm during the Democratic National Convention and were themselves assaulted by policemen on Mayor Richard Daley's orders. See works by Lipset and Altbach (1969), Fraser (1988), Gitlin (1993) and Kurlansky (2004).

⁶¹ The Joint Student Action Committee for Civil Rights had its origins in a 7 March 1967 protest against the banning of the QUB Republican Club by Minister of Home Affairs Bill Craig. It was then called the Joint

numerous marches, protests, and sit-down strikes across Belfast to support the Derry marchers and the civil rights cause. Its members exercised a surprising level of restraint in the face of taunts by hostile policemen and loyalist counter-protestors. While their grievances echoed those of NICRA, their interest lay especially in electoral reform.⁶²

The PD had an eclectic cast of characters, from moderate nationalists to anarchists, it was particularly popular with radical socialists. It was energetic and unpredictable, united by anger more than ideology. The PD was, from the outset, loosely run by a 'faceless committee' that enacted the resolutions voted upon by a majority of its members, which is to say that anyone with the stamina and dedication to endure its numerous and long meetings could sway its agenda. Before long, liberal unionists and moderate nationalists dropped out of PD, giving greater room for the radical socialists to take charge: Michael Farrell (leader of the small Young Socialist Alliance or YSA); Bernadette Devlin, a psychology student with much verve and spontaneity; and Kevin Boyle, a junior law lecturer.

Meanwhile in Derry, a group of concerned civil rights supporters came together on 9 October to form the Derry Citizens' Action Committee (DCAC). An almost inverted picture of PD, the DCAC was centrally controlled by a consortium of moderate middle-class nationalists determined to channel civil rights agitation into a structured and disciplined form. The young militants of the DHAC were invited to take part in the new association, but it was clear that this was done by the DCAC's moderate leadership to

Action Committee Against the Suppression of Liberties. "It created an alliance between a tiny group of revolutionaries, a minority of liberals, and a large number of students who were vaguely worried about civil liberties." Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.204.

⁶² 'One man-one vote' was a popular chant in PD marches. It condemned the gerrymandering of electoral wards as well as the archaic nature of the voting system which chronically favored the Unionist party. For instance, municipal votes were allocated solely to property owners and plural votes were awarded to company owners based on rates. Four Stormont seats were also allocated to Queens' University and its (mostly Protestant) graduates.

rein in the radicals. The true power brokers of the DCAC were Ivan Cooper, a Protestant businessman and Labour party member, and John Hume, a Catholic teacher-turned-entrepreneur and president of the Irish Credit Union movement. Eamonn McCann, the exuberant DHAC leader and long-time rival of the solemn John Hume, slammed the door on the new body, complaining that it was “too middle-aged, middle-class, and middle-of-the-road.”⁶³ He soon joined Farrell and the other radical socialists of the Peoples’ Democracy movement.

John Hume was a highly touted latecomer to the civil rights cause. Though he distinguished himself in 1965 as President of the University for Derry Action Committee, he subsequently turned down positions in NICRA and several political parties to pursue his own social justice initiatives: the credit union movement and a local business.⁶⁴ Hume was strong-minded and fiercely independent, preferring not to be tied to any party or association in which he could not play a central role.

The DCAC protests were meticulously orchestrated. They demonstrated a level of discipline unparalleled by NICRA and PD. Its use of stewards and its focus on educating the masses were exemplary. During its very short life, the DCAC proved exceedingly effective in rallying enormous, well-mannered crowds. On 19 October, it held a large sit-down strike at the Derry Guildhall; on 2 November, it led a widely-attended symbolic procession along the aborted route of the 5 October march; and on 16 November, 15,000

⁶³ McCann: *War and an Irish Town*, p.45

⁶⁴ As far as NICRA was concerned, Hume did not want to participate in a body composed largely of republicans and communists. He also turned down a position on the National Council for Civil Liberties, biding his time for a jump into parliamentary politics. Nonetheless, he was a strong advocate of self-help initiatives (See his *Irish Times* articles of 18 and 19 May 1964). He believed self-help initiatives would help empower poor Catholics and allow them to play a more active role in Northern Ireland political affairs. He founded the Derry Housing Association, (distinct from the more radical DHAC) and left the teaching profession in 1967 to set up a salmon-smoking venture with his Credit Union associate, Michael Canavan. This was done to encourage local resource development initiatives in unemployment-torn Derry.

people participated in a similar march that ended peacefully in the city centre with the reading of the International Declaration of Human Rights. Altogether, the DCAC mobilized the Derry Catholic community in a way that could only have been dreamed of three months before.

The DCAC protests, more than any other civil rights initiative, led Prime Minister O'Neill to issue a reform-package proposal on 22 November 1968.⁶⁵ The promised reforms would abolish multiple votes, create a new method of housing allocation with an ombudsman, abolish the Special Powers Act (which conferred powers of internment to the police),⁶⁶ and abolish Derry corporation to replace it with an appointed bipartisan council.

On 30 November, armed loyalists threatened a civil rights march in Armagh,⁶⁷ and O'Neill feared a violent loyalist backlash. He subsequently appeared on television to call for moderation on all sides, warning "Ulster Stands at the Crossroads".⁶⁸ As a further gesture of goodwill, and to pre-empt a cabinet revolt, he sacked Bill Craig. DCAC and NICRA executives declared a four-week moratorium on future marches.

By December 1968, the civil rights movement had compelled the Unionist government to enter the twentieth century. There was, however, a serious lack of unity within the movement. If it seemed united in its demands for housing, electoral, and policing

⁶⁵ The reforms were also the result of an ultimatum given O'Neill by U.K. Prime Minister Wilson. At a closed session on 4 November 1968, the Northern Ireland PM was told that he was either to pass reforms of his own or be forced to do so by London. See Wilson's Memoirs: *The Labour Government: 1964-1970: A Personal Record*.

⁶⁶ The state's powers of internment were to be dissolved at such a time when relative peace was assured. As sectarian violence increased over the following months, emergency powers remained in force and were never abolished. Bew and Gillespie: *Northern Ireland: A Chronology of the Troubles 1968-1993* (1993), p.7.

⁶⁷ The event led to a prison sentence for Ian Paisley and his lieutenant, Ronald Bunting, giving the loyalist leaders an aura of martyrdom in certain Protestant circles.

⁶⁸ See "Understanding Northern Ireland: The Historical Evidence." Ulster Television Productions (c.1993). The speech is reprinted in Terence O'Neill: *Ulster at the Crossroads* (1969).

reforms, it was significantly weakened by a number of competing agendas and personal clashes. While most of the civil rights leadership was willing to give O'Neill some time to produce a palatable reform package, the radical socialists that dominated PD had no desire to do so. On 20 December, a reduced version of PD—with Farrell, Toman, McCann, Devlin and Boyle at the helm—declared it would not accept the moratorium. They announced instead their plan to hold a Belfast-to-Derry march in January 1968, closely modeled on the American Selma-to-Montgomery march of March 1965. This decision was to have disastrous consequences on the unity and survival of the civil rights movement.

VI. FROM CIVIL RIGHTS TO CIVIL WAR

The PD's 'Long March' to Derry failed to attract more than forty participants to its official send-off on 1 January 1969. Their numbers grew over the next three days, however, largely as a public reaction against the harassment they suffered from Paisleyites along the way. On the fourth day, the marchers were ambushed at Burntollet Bridge (near Derry) by a group of loyalist thugs and off-duty B-Specials armed with blunt weapons and stones.⁶⁹ The RUC did a half-hearted job defending the marchers; some officers were even photographed engaging in pleasant banter with the attackers. The Burntollet events sparked immediate rioting in Derry and forced the DCAC and NICRA, which had originally opposed the march, to grudgingly express solidarity with the PD marchers.

⁶⁹ See Bowes Egan and Vincent McCormack: "Memorandum to the Commission of Enquiry Established to Investigate the Causes of Recent Disturbances in Northern Ireland" (23 September 1969), and the photographic evidence shown in *Burntollet* (1969). Egan and McCormack confirmed that several Orange halls had been used for the stocking and distribution of weapons.

On 11 January, the PD launched a poorly planned march in Newry, refusing NICRA and DCAC assistance. The protest degenerated into a riot, initiated by unruly demonstrators.⁷⁰ Subsequently, most moderates withdrew their support from the civil rights movement in disgust. Many prominent NICRA members also resigned in the following weeks over the nomination of PD members Michael Farrell and Kevin Boyle to its executive.

Prime Minister O'Neill, faced with a potentially explosive situation, asserted his leadership by calling a snap election in February. The ensuing Unionist victory was, at best, inconclusive. O'Neill not only failed to consolidate sufficient support for his reform package, a number of anti-O'Neill Unionists captured important seats. Much to his embarrassment, Ian Paisley ran in O'Neill's riding and posted a strong loyalist following. Adding insult to injury, Catholics continued to boycott the Unionist Party; many voted instead for PD candidates. Meanwhile, John Hume, who ran in Derry as an independent civil rights candidate, displaced the Nationalist leader, Eddie McAteer.⁷¹ A few weeks later, Bernadette Devlin captured the mid-Ulster seat in Westminster at a by-election, becoming the youngest British MP ever elected. Though she was certainly enthusiastic in her promotion of civil rights in the London Parliament, she quickly made new enemies. Gerry Fitt found her to be a difficult and unruly partner.

A loyalist bombing operation, disguised as an IRA campaign, brought O'Neill to the brink of political helplessness in April. On the verge of a cabinet revolt, he tendered his

⁷⁰ Purdie suggests this may have been the work of an *agent provocateur* (*Politics in the Streets*, endnote p.259), but a closer reading of his source—Geoff Robertson's *Reluctant Judas: The Life and Death of the Special Branch Informer, Kenneth Lennon* (1976)—does not provide sufficient evidence to suggest this.

⁷¹ McAteer's and Hume's Foyle riding was the south-western portion of Derry city where the Bogside and Creggan estates are located. It was a strongly Catholic riding with a high level of unemployment, and the site of the 'Battle of the Bogside' in August 1969.

resignation and was replaced on 28 April 1969 by his taciturn cousin, James Chichester-Clarke. The new first minister commanded more respect within the party and exercised greater tact in applying O'Neill's reforms, but the fire had nonetheless been set to the sectarian powder keg. Outbursts of urban violence and police 'pogroms' in Catholic neighbourhoods were recurrent events in the months to follow.

The future of civil rights protest was sealed on 12 August 1969 when an Apprentice Boys parade in Derry triggered a major altercation pitting Bogside residents against police and loyalists. The resulting mayhem saw a number of civil rights activists, including Eamonn McCann and Bernadette Devlin MP, take part in the violence. Two days later, British troops were mobilized in Derry and throughout the North of Ireland to relieve the RUC and pacify the province.

The honeymoon was brief. The loyalist backlash, along with the use of internment by British troops, led many republicans to turn their backs on the demilitarized 'Official' IRA and to form armed 'defence associations'. In the winter of 1969-70, the Provisional IRA took shape and became the new voice of militant republicanism. Gone were the Marxist maxims of the official leadership and all talk of civil rights and reforms. The 'Provos' proclaimed that only armed resistance would bring an end to a half century of Unionist rule. Faced with internment and interminable violence, there were many who believed them.

During the winter of 1969-70, the paramilitary violence that raged across Northern Ireland dragged the sectarian beast into full view, eclipsing whatever remained of the movement. The nationalists of DCAC and NICRA formed the Social and Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), taking their constitutional agenda out of the streets and back into

parliament. NICRA was disbanded. Though it was briefly revived in 1971, it remained a small and unimposing wing of the 'official' republican movement. Many PD members, such as Kevin Boyle and Eamonn McCann, abandoned their quest, having become all but invisible and irrelevant in the new political context. Others more strongly republican at heart, such as Michael Farrell and Bernadette Devlin, soon became indistinguishable from the 'Provos' who now dominated the media. With the nationalists in Stormont and the republicans torn in two, PD slowly fell into obscurity.

Civil war had come. The era of civil rights was no more.

CHAPTER 2

THE LIMITING SCOPE OF PROXIMITY: *FOUR HISTORIOGRAPHICAL PROBLEMS*

*The history of Northern Ireland from 1921 to 1972 is a trawling ground for those who wish to lend legitimacy to contemporary political claims. Unionist and nationalist each has his own version, and rarely do the accounts match.*⁷²

Historical accounts of Northern Ireland during the sixties are numerous, though brief, and are usually embedded within works of a general nature.⁷³ In contrast with the wealth of published texts on the subject of the troubles, there exist but few works which target the Northern Ireland civil rights movement specifically and in much detail.⁷⁴

Interestingly, the only three historical works to delve deeply into the movement were not written by Irish historians but by an American (Brian Dooley), a Scot (Bob Purdie), and a Northern Irish graduate student and former participant-observer (Paul Arthur).

An overwhelming amount of this 'civil rights literature'⁷⁵ also tends to present twentieth century Northern Ireland as a hermetically sealed society somehow untouched by international trends and ideas. If, as shall be demonstrated in the second half of this thesis, the primary record does reveal that the Northern Ireland civil rights movement was spurred on to a significant extent by the international context of the sixties, we should ask

⁷² Dermot Quinn: *Understanding Northern Ireland* (1993), p.15.

⁷³ For examples of historical works on Northern Ireland see Dudley Edwards (1970), Moody (1974), Hennessey (1997), Loughlin (1998), and Bardon (2001).

⁷⁴ Works by Arthur (*The People's Democracy*, 1974) and Dooley (*The Black and the Green*, 1998) are, to date, the only historical monographs which treat specifically with an aspect of the movement, while Purdie (*Politics in the Streets*, 1990) has written the only comprehensive history of the movement as a whole. For journalistic accounts of the period (embedded within analysis of the Troubles), see works by the Sunday Times Insight Team (1972), Van Voris (1975), B. Whyte (1985), Coogan (1996), B. O'Brien (2000) and Walsh (2000); for accounts of an autobiographical nature, see Devlin (1969), McCann (1974), Farrell (1976, 1988), McKeown (1984), McCluskey (1989), and Currie (2005); for works of a political nature, see Bew et al. (1993, 1996), Coulter (1999), and P. Rose (2000); and for sociological accounts, see R. Rose (1971, 1976), the second edition of Barritt & Carter (1972), and Hewitt's 1981 article in the *British Journal of Sociology*.

⁷⁵ Given the lack of specific works on the subject, this expression necessarily includes all works of an historical or social scientific nature that include some analysis of the movement and its context.

ourselves why the secondary literature makes so little mention of this. We can wonder if, in fact, our understanding of the underlying causes of the movement need not be reconsidered.

*I. THE PROBLEM OF PRESENT-MINDEDNESS*⁷⁶

Recent works on contemporary Northern Ireland have overwhelmingly taken the form of ‘sectarian epics’; they focus almost exclusively on long-term and geographically-specific tensions between Protestant/unionist and Catholic/nationalist communities. “As a consequence,” write Shirlow and McGovern, “the reality of class, gender and other axes of social division [have been] underplayed in the context of a highly politicised ethnic separation.”⁷⁷ This is certainly true of the civil rights literature, which has been written in large part against the tense backdrop of the troubles by authors trying to make sense of the civil war raging outside their door.

Because the Troubles have widely been perceived as a domestic conflict between republicans and unionists⁷⁸ and because research has demonstrated an organic relationship between the civil rights agitation of 1968-69 and the outbreak of the Troubles during the years 1969-1972, it has often been assumed that the civil rights movement was, simply put, a purely domestic disturbance. The overpowering influence of contemporary politics has tended to favour historical models which focus almost

⁷⁶ This phrase, coined by historian J.C.D. Clark, is applied to the Irish historical literature by D. George Boyce in “Past and Present Revisionism and the Northern Ireland Troubles,” in Boyce and O’Day, eds.: *The Making of Modern Irish History* (1996), p.217.

⁷⁷ Peter Shirlow and Mark McGovern, eds.: *Who Are ‘The People’? Unionism, Protestantism, and Loyalism in Northern Ireland* (1997), p.4-5. Some of the few exceptions I have found to this pattern is a master’s thesis by Mary Katherine Bolster: *Women on the March: Women in the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland in the 1960s* (1991), as well as Dooley’s *Black and Green* and Purdie’s *Politics in the Streets*.

⁷⁸ By ‘domestic conflict’, I mean a conflict that is proper to the British Isles and almost exclusively the fruit of Anglo-Irish or Irish-Irish relations (i.e.: depending on one’s political perspective—unionist, republican, or constitutional nationalist. See John Whyte: *Interpreting Northern Ireland* (1990), p114, *passim*.)

exclusively on constitutional matters and the sectarian problem. Most chroniclers of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement have thus avoided delving too deeply into the matter of foreign influence. Influences originating in America, Europe or Africa are quite often given superficial notice, if not altogether ignored. James Loughlin, for instance, argues that the American civil rights movement had, at best, only a superficial impact on its Northern Ireland counterpart:

The novelty of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland has perhaps suggested a sharper break with the political mentality of the past than was in fact the case. [...] The Black civil rights movement in the USA was a model adopted superficially from television coverage without due consideration of its suitability in the very different Ulster environment. Street marches, sit-downs, passive resistance and songs such as 'We Will Overcome' [sic] had a very different implication in Armagh than Alabama.⁷⁹

Likewise, Bew, Gibbon and Patterson propose that although the forms of protest adopted by the Northern Ireland movement

had their immediate pedigree in the moderate American civil rights movement and were intended to evoke its image, in practice their impact in Northern Ireland was at variance with this secular inspiration. In Ulster demonstrations had distinctly non-secular implications. Marches in particular meant, and still mean, the assertion of territorial sectarian claims.⁸⁰

Such assertions are unfortunately rarely backed up with facts and references and demonstrate the authors' unfamiliarity with the American civil rights context.⁸¹ Such conclusions also ignore any possible influence coming from other foreign contexts, such as Africa or Europe.

⁷⁹ James Loughlin, *The Ulster Question Since 1945* (1985), p.34, 42.

⁸⁰ Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon, and Henry Patterson: *Northern Ireland 1921-1996: Political Forces and Social Classes* (1996), p.155.

⁸¹ Bew, Gibbon and Patterson seem unfamiliar with the tense relationship that did exist between moderates and radicals in the American civil rights movement, as well as the tensions between the religious, Marxist, and nationalist ideologies held by its various members. While marches in Northern Ireland did have a loaded political significance, Bew et al. also assume that marches, lunch counter sit-ins, and freedom rides in Alabama and Mississippi were somehow less 'territorial' and more 'secular' than civil rights protests in Northern Ireland. Works by Carson (1981), Ralph (1993), Meier and Rudwick (1975), Van Deburg (1992), and McWhorter (2001) suggest that this was not necessarily the case.

Inversely, while these authors have gone to some length to play down the influence of foreign events, other chroniclers of the movement have stated the exact opposite but in a manner that leaves serious questions unanswered. The following passages echo numerous claims found here and there in the literature, suggesting that the Northern Ireland civil rights movement was profoundly impacted by international events:

The civil rights marches [were organised] in conscious imitation of similar movements in America and elsewhere...⁸²

The campaign in Derry became a civil rights campaign [...] in large measure because it was informed by the experience of the civil rights movement in the United States and awoke echoes of that campaign. From the US, it consciously borrowed the rhetoric of civil rights, the commitment to non-violence and the tactics, which NICRA had been reluctant to use, of civil disobedience and the deliberate breaking of 'unjust' laws.⁸³

...The age of television had come into its own. Popular action could attract immediate worldwide attention and the year 1968 provided numerous examples, such as: the peaceful defiance of Prague as the Soviet tanks rolled in; demonstrations against the Vietnam War; the continuing campaign for Black civil rights in America; and the students' revolt in Paris.⁸⁴

Sadly, such claims are almost always made in passing and represent, in each case, the near *totality* of the author's discussion of the international context. While they stand apart of the assessments made by Loughlin and Bew, Gibbon and Patterson, they appear as mere parentheses in a text that is, otherwise, little affected by these claims.⁸⁵

Several other works make no reference whatsoever to the international context that surrounded the Northern Ireland civil rights movement.⁸⁶ These usually depict the

⁸² T.W. Moody: *The Ulster Question 1603-1973* (1974), p.33.

⁸³ Niall Ó Dochartaigh: *From Civil Rights to Armalities: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles* (1997), p.26.

⁸⁴ Jonathan Bardon: *A History of Ulster*, revised edition (2001), p.650-1.

⁸⁵ Only two historical monographs diverge from this trend: Arthur's *The People's Democracy* (1974) and Dooley's *Black and Green* (1998)—discussed further in Section IV. Despite their titles, Guelke's *Northern Ireland: the International Perspective* (1988) and Ó Dochartaigh's *Ulster's White Negroes: From Civil Rights to Insurrection* (1994) do not address the question of foreign influence in much, if any, depth.

⁸⁶ See for instance Morgan and Taylor's "Forget the Myths, Here's the Reality" (*Fortnight*, October 1998) and works by Moore (1993), P. Taylor (1999), and P. Rose (2000).

movement as a purely domestic crisis whose causes are somewhat vaguely defined.

Jonathan Moore, for instance, suggests that

From the early 1960s onwards, increasing sections of the Catholic community realised that this political obsession with partition was achieving nothing for the minority community. There was now a demand, particularly from within the emerging Catholic middle classes, for full participation within the Northern state. As a result of this attitudinal change, there developed civil rights organisations which focused on the widespread discrimination against the Catholic minority.⁸⁷

This sudden “attitudinal change” from nationalism to “full participation within the Northern state” raises more questions about the underlying causes of the movement than it answers. Likewise, Peter Taylor pessimistically suggests that the civil rights movement and the subsequent Troubles were caused by an unavoidable cycle of sectarian violence integral to the workings of Irish society:

Although history already made it inevitable that periodically down the centuries Ireland would erupt into violence, the particular conditions that sparked the current conflict were already well-established by the time Peter Ward was murdered [in 1966] by the UVF. The events that were to follow in the years ahead only accelerated the process as more and more ‘ordinary family men’, on both sides, became killers.⁸⁸

By rolling back the beginnings of the Troubles to 1966, Taylor has ascribed to the period of civil rights agitation an atmosphere of paramilitary violence which really only emerged in strength during and after 1969, in the wake of the civil rights movement. The civil rights movement finds itself here engulfed in the whirling vortex of the Troubles a full three years before the arrival of British troops, and four years before the Provisional IRA was even founded.

Fitting the past into politically-motivated sectarian epics, argues D. George Boyce, is a recurring problem in Irish historical writing. Under the weight of deep-rooted political

⁸⁷ Jonathan Moore: “The Labour Party and Northern Ireland in the 1960s,” in Eamonn Hughes, ed.: *Culture and Politics in Northern Ireland 1960-1990* (1993), p.74.

⁸⁸ Peter Taylor: *Loyalists: War and Peace in Northern Ireland* (1999), p.46.

ideologies, the Irish past is often engineered to reflect a mythical dualist tragedy, “in which ‘Taig’ met ‘Prod’ yet again [...] a kind of Irish predestiny that linked past and present, and that saw the only valid theme in Irish history as the struggle, the long, enduring struggle, between Ireland and England.”⁸⁹ Although, he adds, “historians cannot ignore the historical dimension of the Ulster troubles, [...] they must also be aware of the danger of writing history teleologically.”⁹⁰

A salient example of the politically-motivated sectarian epic can be found in Tim Pat Coogan’s *The Troubles* (1996), in which aspects of the civil rights movement are adapted to fit the author’s traditional nationalist convictions. He describes the movement as the direct descendant of Daniel O’Connell’s nineteenth century Catholic Association⁹¹ and grounds the movement wholly in the age-old struggle of the Irish people against “800 years of British oppression”—a quasi-Homeric tale featuring Henry II, Strongbow, Brian Boru and the Vikings!⁹² Another example of the ‘sectarian epic’ can be found in the writings of unionist Steve Bruce, who calls the civil rights marches “old-fashioned nationalism,” and “deliberate exercises in coat-trailing.”⁹³ Bruce ignores much of the ideological diversity that existed within the movement and the fact that its most influential leaders (Hume, Fitt, McCluskey, Heatley, Sinclair, etc.) were advocates of moderation. Although he briefly acknowledges that the movement was “heavily influenced by the black civil rights campaigns and the student anti-war movement in the

⁸⁹ Boyce: “Past and Present Revisionism and the Northern Ireland Troubles,” in Boyce and O’Day, eds.: *The Making of Modern Irish History* (1996), p.217-19.

⁹⁰ Ibid. p.217-219

⁹¹ Coogan: *The Troubles*, p.10.

⁹² Ibid. p.4

⁹³ Bruce: *The Red Hand*, p.27, 28. See also *God Save Ulster*, p.93.

United States and major European capitals,”⁹⁴ this assertion has no impact on the rest of the text.

Thus has the experience of the troubles led the above-mentioned authors to short-change, disregard, or utterly ignore the international context in which the civil rights movement evolved and from which it drew much of its impetus. “To revisit Northern Ireland in the 1960s,” remarked Bob Purdie, “is to enter a lost world in which most of the political landmarks are different and different assumptions and aspirations underpin politics.”⁹⁵ Unfortunately, personal experiences and political convictions have prevented many authors from realizing the impact which the world beyond Irish shores has had on the Irish past.

II. THE PROBLEM OF DISLOCATION

Published comparative studies on Northern Ireland have not shed much light on the numerous causal links that existed between the Northern Ireland civil rights movement and events occurring in the non-Irish world.⁹⁶ While Northern Ireland and the civil rights agitation are often considered alongside concurrent or similar events (the 1968 Paris uprisings, South African apartheid, civil war in Cyprus, the American civil rights movement, etc.), such works do not, generally, seek to unearth organic relationships of influence but to propose theories of societal conflict. While not without sociological merit, such works do perpetuate the image of a politically isolated Northern Ireland—a society affected principally, if not almost exclusively, by domestic sectarian forces.

⁹⁴ Ibid. p.27

⁹⁵ Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.1.

⁹⁶ See works by Lipset and Altbach (1968), Clutterbuck (1973), R. Rose’s 1976 article comparing Northern Ireland and the American Deep South, Coyle (1993), J.H. Whyte (1981), O’Sullivan See (1986), Fraser (1988), and Akenson (1991).

A good example of this can be found in Richard Rose's "On the Priorities of Citizenship in the Deep South and Northern Ireland" (1976), in which the similarities and differences between the legal struggles of American civil rights associations (NAACP, SCLC) and those of similar groups in Northern Ireland (CSJ, NICRA) are discussed. While Rose draws interesting conclusions on the nature and achievements of both movements, he makes no reference to any points of contact or influence which may have linked the two spheres. Rose's works have been drawn upon heavily by subsequent researchers, and he is considered by most an authority on the Northern Ireland of the sixties.⁹⁷ His silence on the links between American and Northern Ireland movements has led many who followed him to assume no such links existed.⁹⁸

Richard Clutterbuck's *Protest and the Urban Guerilla* (1973) focuses principally on the People's Democracy movement, comparing it to other radical student movements of the sixties in Italy and France:

Penned into the Latin Quarter by police cars blocking all the Seine bridges the frustrated student leaders sent out the word that the Latin Quarter must be seized and the police kept out at all costs—just as the Bogside were to do a year later in Londonderry.⁹⁹

While Clutterbuck's study demonstrates definite similarities between the three groups, it does not address the issue of causality. Whether such similarities were the fruit of collaboration, influence, mimicry or pure coincidence is not discussed. Sadly,

⁹⁷ See Rose: *Governing Without Concensus* (1971), a benchmark study on the sociological state of Northern Ireland during the late sixties.

⁹⁸ It took two decades before Rose's silence on this issue was addressed via an article by Andrew J. Wilson: "The American Congress for Irish Freedom and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-70," *Eire-Ireland*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1994). Wilson subsequently published *Irish America and the Ulster Conflict* (1995).

⁹⁹ Richard Clutterbuck: *Protest and the Urban Gorilla*, p.205.

Clutterbuck's account includes a number of glaring inaccuracies which fit his conclusions but not the historical evidence.¹⁰⁰

On this point he is not alone. The comparative literature tends to give the Northern Ireland civil rights movement only passing attention, highlighting sectarian elements and often bypassing other sociological factors which may have helped kindle the crisis of 1968-69. Dominick J. Coyle's *Minorities in Revolt: Political Violence in Ireland, Italy, and Cyprus* (1983) and Katherine O'Sullivan See's *First World Nationalisms Class and Ethnic Politics in Northern Ireland and Quebec* (1986) are one-dimensional in their depiction of the civil rights movement; both tend to focus overly on nationalist politics to the detriment of all other social forces. Like Clutterbuck, they also make some questionable broad assumptions and contain a number of historical inaccuracies.¹⁰¹

Recent comparative studies on Northern Ireland do shed more light on the nature of societal violence in the province, but because many of these works focus almost exclusively on constitutional and sectarian issues, they have perpetuated rather than challenged the 'sectarian epic' problem. Donald Akenson has suggested, for example, that to understand segregation in Ulster, South Africa and Israel one must understand that "the ideas that count the most are religious. [...] to see [economics] as the key to most

¹⁰⁰ For instance, he wrongly attests that the agenda of the PD was to set up a totalitarian People's Republic of Ireland (p.51), that PD helped organise the 5 October 1968 march in Derry (p.63) when it did not yet exist, and that republicans within the civil rights movement aimed to topple the Stormont parliament in order to bring about direct rule from London so as to rekindle the armed struggle (p.76). Clutterbuck also makes little distinction between 'Official' and 'Provisional' IRA, identifies NICRA's agenda as fundamentally Trotskyite, and portrays the revolutionary PD of 1969 as representative of the movement as a whole.

¹⁰¹ O'Sullivan See states, for instance, that the student activists of PD were among the *early* participants of the movement; that the 'Battle of the Bogside' of *August* 1969 was directly caused by the Burntoltet Bridge incident of *January* 1969; and that the Provisional IRA was active during the O'Neill Regime. Coyle proposes that student revolts in Italy in 1967 inspired and set the standard for all other revolutionary student movements in the following two years. I have found no primary sources which suggest that civil rights activists in Northern Ireland took any significant notice of the 1967 Italian revolts.

major events is tantamount to confusing science with engineering.”¹⁰² Sadly, such viewpoints have not been entirely benign and have led to a wide-scale pigeon-holing of Northern Ireland as a place where sectarianism is the principal, if not the only, cause of political tension.

III. THE PROBLEM OF FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE

It has taken nearly three decades for a comprehensive biographical literature to emerge on this subject and it still does not reflect the full ideological spectrum of the movement.¹⁰³ The early years of the Troubles saw the publication of Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey’s *The Price of My Soul* (1969), Eamonn McCann’s *War and an Irish Town* (1974), and Michael Farrell’s *Northern Ireland: the Orange State* (1976).¹⁰⁴ These accounts set the tone for a civil rights historiography that, for over a decade, focused almost exclusively on the People’s Democracy and related ‘radical’ elements. Farrell has been, along with McCann, one of the most prolific chroniclers of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement. Works by these two authors tend to be very personal and strongly politicized.¹⁰⁵

Biographical accounts of moderate civil rights leaders only began to emerge during the eighties with Hazel Morrissey’s *Betty Sinclair: A Woman’s Fight for Socialism* (1983), Ciaran McKeown’s *The Passion of Peace* (1984), Barry Whyte’s *John Hume: Statesman*

¹⁰² Akenson: *God’s People: Covenant and Land in South Africa, Israel, and Ulster*, p.353.

¹⁰³ Biographical studies of ‘Official’ republicans (e.g.:Cathal Goulding, Roy Johnston, etc.) and NICRA communists are yet to emerge. Nonetheless, a varied biographical literature on the Northern Ireland civil rights movement had finally taken shape by the late eighties.

¹⁰⁴ Paul Arthur’s *The People’s Democracy* (1974), himself a former PD sympathiser and participant, also relies heavily on personal reminiscences and interviews with former PD activists, especially with Farrell.

¹⁰⁵ Devlin’s autobiography has also been castigated by numerous past activists as “flippant,” “self-serving,” and “great rhetoric, but damaging to what many held dear,” (Conn McCluskey: *Up off Their Knees*, 1989, p.145), noting that she wrote “in such terms as to make me wonder whether she had actually been in attendance at all.” (Austin Currie: *All Hell Will Break Loose*, 2004, p.104-5.)

of the Troubles (1985) and Conn McCluskey's *Up Off Their Knees: A Commentary on the Civil Rights Movement* (1989). *Twenty Years On*, a collection of articles written by former activists of a strongly republican and/or Marxist slant, edited by Michael Farrell, was also published in 1988. Austin Currie's autobiography *All Hell Will Break Loose* (2004) has also appeared recently.¹⁰⁶

Contrasting with the 'sectarian epics' discussed in Section I of this chapter, this body of literature does claim that numerous international events inspired the civil rights leadership: South African apartheid laws, the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, US civil rights marches, the Paris "May Days", European union and Anglo-Irish free-trade negotiations, the Biafran famine and the Vietnam war. Such claims counterbalance significantly the conclusions of the secondary works discussed above. Nonetheless, they should also be studied with a grain of caution. The selective and personal nature of such texts does not permit the reader to draw accurate conclusions as to the full gamut of influences which affected the movement. In hindsight, former activists have at times conveniently distorted the past by either embellishing or else omitting certain facts. A glaring example of this can be found in Paul Routledge's *John Hume: A Biography* (1997), in which Hume, discussing the 5 October 1968 civil rights march, says:

That is when I realised that civil rights was the way forward. It also coincided with the US civil rights movement. I was very conscious of that. Martin Luther King is one of my great heroes. The first things you see on the wall of my Donegal home are his words 'I Have a Dream.'¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶ There also exists a series of articles written by Fred Heatley (former NICRA treasurer and founding member of the Wolfe Tone Society), which appeared in *Fortnight* (22 March-7 June 1974); and numerous interviews which appear in the pages of W.H. Van Voris' *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary* (1975). Former activists have also contributed to forensic and sociological studies on the movement, such as Bowes Egan and Vincent McCormack (*Burntollet*, 1969); and Kevin Boyle, (Boyle, Hadden, and Hilliard : *Law and State: The Case of Northern Ireland*, 1975).

¹⁰⁷ John Hume, interviewed by Paul Routledge, in *John Hume: A Biography* (1997), p.64.

Though Hume may have been well-informed at the time of King and the American civil rights campaign, he ascribes to King, thirty years later, an importance which is not reflected in any of his writings of the day or in the general pattern of his actions.¹⁰⁸

Like most autobiographical sources, these also tend to be self-serving. Michael Farrell, like Bernadette Devlin, has been severely criticized for substituting his own ideological positions for those of the larger community. An example of this can be found in his introduction to *Twenty Years On* (1988):

The heroic story of the Argentinean revolutionary [Che Guevara] moved a whole generation of youths across the world [...] We had already been inspired by Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream' speech [...] in 1963, and angered at newsreel pictures of racist United States police batoning black protestors. [...] We had wept at film of children burned by Napalm in Vietnam. [...] Revolution was in the air in the late sixties...¹⁰⁹

While we can assume, as does Farrell, that television did have a great impact on the views of young Northern Ireland Catholics in the late sixties, it requires a significant stretch of the imagination to claim, as he does, that the entire collective of students who participated in PD protests in the fall of 1968 sympathised with revolutionary movements in Cuba, Vietnam, China, and Algeria. In reviewing Farrell's *Twenty Years On*, the constitutional nationalist Austin Currie has suggested that views expressed by Farrell and his collaborators

were not representative of the civil rights movement 20 years ago and in that respect at least they have not changed. [...] Most of these contributor participants were peripheral to the civil rights movement. Only the very ideologically committed would have seen any similarity (or wished for any) between Derry and

¹⁰⁸ Hume was a reluctant participant in street protests and a firm advocate of parliamentary politics and self-help. He was quick to put an end to DCAC-sponsored protests in December 1969, a mere two months after its creation, and to run for political office the next spring. Owen Dudley Edwards has suggested that it was only by necessity that Hume resolved to endorse popular protest; he was, from the beginning, "an apologist for representative politics." (Dudley Edwards: *The Sins of Our Fathers*, 1970, p.250. See also Routledge: *John Hume*, p.66, where Eamonn McCann and Gerry Fitt criticize Hume's political timidity and his rather timorous presence at the 5 October 1968 march.)

¹⁰⁹ Michael Farrell: *Twenty Years On* (1988), p.11.

Petrograd during the 1917 revolution or Havana when Fidel Castro and Ché Guevara entered it in 1959.¹¹⁰

While offering greater insight into the international aspects of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement, biographical sources have an overly narrow and personal scope. Because they demonstrate undue emotional proximity with the subject, they should be studied as portals into the minds of former activists, not as necessarily precise depictions of the movement as a whole.

IV. THE PROBLEM OF TUNNEL VISION

There exist only three historical monographs that address, to any significant extent, the links between the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland and the international wave of political protest that marked the world of the late sixties. These are Paul Arthur's *The People's Democracy 1968-73* (1974), Bob Purdie's *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement In Northern Ireland* (1990), and Brian Dooley's *Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland and Black America* (1998). Owen Dudley Edwards' *The Sins Of Our Fathers* (1970), a melancholic chronicle of Irish conflict, shares many aspects of the 'sectarian epic', but unlike the works discussed in section I, Dudley Edwards lends greater attention to some of the foreign influences of the civil rights movement.¹¹¹ Andrew J. Wilson's "The American Congress for Irish Freedom and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-70," (1994) also reveals the impact which the Irish-American community had on the Northern Ireland civil rights

¹¹⁰ Austin Currie: "Discriminating Interpretations," *Fortnight*, No. 268, December 1988, p.19.

¹¹¹ Perhaps because he was writing it in the opening days of the Troubles, Dudley Edwards remains faithful to the political discourse of the late sixties (i.e.: civil rights, alienation of minorities, decolonization, New Left socialism, and the ghost of McCarthyism) as opposed to the sectarianism-obsessing authors who wrote in later years.

campaign.¹¹² These authors have demonstrated that foreign events *did* greatly inspire the civil rights campaign in Northern Ireland. Nonetheless, they vary significantly in their interpretations of this phenomenon.

In *The Sins of Our Fathers* (1970), Dudley Edwards portrays the Northern Ireland civil rights movement as the ideological child of third world decolonization movements:

Although the great agitation of 1968-69 was wholly rooted in Northern Ireland in its personnel and character, it drew some influences from and came to form a critical part in a movement of world-wide dimensions. [...] It is necessary to glance at the universal ideological crisis from which Northern Ireland could not remain immune. It was certainly appropriate that Northern Ireland, the deformed and idiotic offspring of British colonialism in Ireland, should find the beginning of its redemption in a protest whose origins coincided with the downfall of old-fashioned imperialism elsewhere in the world. The protest of the 1960s is essentially the child of the movement for Afro-Asian freedom in the late 1940s and 1950s. In simple terms, the non-white peoples have repaid their white oppressors by re-educating them in the meaning of freedom.¹¹³

An openly nationalist historian—albeit a self-avowed pacifist—Dudley Edwards takes some distance from traditional nationalist opinions. He gives credit to a wide range of factors beyond the obligatory indictment of partition in order to account for the emergence of the civil rights movement: ‘baby boom’ culture, reaction to the Vietnam war, anti-McCarthyism, third-world decolonization movements, and the example of the African-American civil rights campaign. However, Dudley Edwards tends to lean too heavily upon his own fundamentalist Catholic world-view, leading him to make a number of spurious claims. He ascribes far too much influence to his own Catholic heroes than the primary literature allows us to infer.¹¹⁴ He calls Pope John XXIII “the Joshua whose

¹¹² Wilson’s article was published in *Eire-Ireland*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1994). This article evolved into a chapter of Wilson’s subsequently published *Irish America and the Ulster Conflict* (1995). See chapter 2 of that work, titled “Irish America and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-1970”.

¹¹³ Owen Dudley Edwards: *The Sins of Our Fathers* (1970), p.240-1.

¹¹⁴ In some cases, the civil rights leaders were ambivalent, if not downright hostile, to the Catholic Church in their pursuit for civil rights (e.g.: Bernadette Devlin: *The Price of My Soul*, 1969, p.70-72 and Conn

trumpet-peal threw down the walls of the Northern Ireland Ghetto”¹¹⁵; American President John F. Kennedy is hailed as the “the illustrious Mick in the White House”, “their master’s master” and “the triumphant Catholic hero”¹¹⁶; and the experiences of Irish Catholic missionaries in the Congo and Zambia as being “of major importance” to the movement’s leadership.¹¹⁷ While Dudley Edwards draws a religious perspective on the problem of violence in Ireland, he has also tended to exaggerate his personal inclinations by giving the Catholic faith a more important role in the movement’s ideology than it actually had.

By contrast, Paul Arthur’s *The People’s Democracy* (1974) presents the Northern Ireland civil rights movement as an arm of the worldwide youth revolt movement of the mid to late sixties. Arthur, being himself a former PD member suggests, not surprisingly, that

The inception of the civil rights demonstrations beginning in late 1968 coincided with the tail-end of a series of student riots in the Western world [...] To understand the nature of student activism in Northern Ireland it is necessary to say *when* it happened that is at the end of 1968. [...] It saw the baptism of new radicals, now isolated from the old Left by their revolutionary actions and the theory which had grown from them, which had melded in the frustrating struggle for civil rights against nuclear extinction, and against the war in Vietnam. Those struggles brought the participants face to face with the governing system whose total authority they challenged and fought.¹¹⁸

McCluskey: Interview with Sarah Ward, quoted in Ward: “The Genesis of Civil Rights in Northern Ireland,” 1993, MSS thesis, Queen’s University, p.101).

¹¹⁵ Dudley Edwards, *The Sins of our Fathers*, p.245.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. p.246-7

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p.244. Such references have not been footnoted by the author. I have found no single reference to Catholic missions, Congo, or Zambia in the writings, interviews, and speeches of the movement’s central leaders.

¹¹⁸ Italics are included in the original text. Paul Arthur: *The People’s Democracy* (1974), p.20, 21, 22.

It is noteworthy that Arthur, like other past members of PD,¹¹⁹ has identified late 1968 as the *beginning* of the civil rights movement. This is a symptom of much of the pro-PD literature, which tends to downplay the early work of moderate nationalists and focus too narrowly on their own part in the movement. In his zeal to weave PD into the tapestry of global youth revolt, Arthur relies strongly on circumstantial evidence and does not always establish a well-documented causal relationship between PD and revolt movements in Italy, Spain, the United States, Germany, Japan, Uruguay and Québec, all of which he claims it emulated. Nonetheless, Arthur does make a strong case as far as Farrell, McCann, and their associates were concerned that the People's Democracy movement did share the core values of the international 'New Left' movement.

Bob Purdie's *Politics in the Streets* (1990) is in many ways a rebuttal to Arthur and the PD radicals. Contrasting strongly with Arthur's conclusions, Purdie reinstates the significant contribution of moderate nationalists such as Conn and Patricia McCluskey who were inspired by civil rights protests in America and who got the civil rights movement in Ireland started several years prior to PD's existence. The civil rights grievances, he states,

were always closely linked to nationalist politics and arose in part from perceptions that were deeply rooted in nationalist ideology [...] inspired by the Black civil rights movement in the United States.¹²⁰

In addressing the extent of foreign influence, Purdie is ambivalent. He minimizes the extent to which the PD was inspired by foreign events and he does so, oddly, by quoting this passage from Arthur's work: " 'By 1968 there was very little indication that Belfast undergraduates were part of the world-wide wave of student protest [...] The largest

¹¹⁹ See for example works by Devlin-McAliskey (1969), Farrell (1976), and Farrell's collection of essays, *Twenty Years On* (1988).

¹²⁰ Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.1-2.

anti-Vietnam march in Belfast attracted only about fifty participants.’¹²¹ Though Purdie demonstrates with many examples that civil rights activists in Northern Ireland borrowed their tactics largely from the United States, no direct link existed, he writes, between the two movements. For this reason, he concludes that the American movement remained only a secondary influence on Northern Ireland nationalists and did not necessarily act as a catalyst for action in Northern Ireland:

Although the Black civil rights movement in the United States had been an inspiration, strictly speaking it was not a model. There is no evidence that any of the founders or leaders of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement ever visited the Southern United States, consulted with any of the Black civil rights organisations, or ever undertook a thorough study of that movement. Their information came from the media and, inevitably, their application of the lessons of the American movement was patchy and reflected their own preoccupations and experiences.¹²²

Purdie reaches this conclusion mainly because of the limited scope of his work, which focuses especially on middle-class moderates and on the period before August 1969.

Andrew J. Wilson’s “The American Congress for Irish Freedom and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-70” (1994) challenges Purdie’s position and demonstrates that Irish-American organisations—namely James Heaney’s American Congress for Irish Freedoms (ACIF)—were not only indispensable allies, fund-raisers, and public relations officers for Northern Ireland activists, they were also very hostile towards the campaign for African-American civil rights at home. This hostility prevented visiting Northern Ireland activists from establishing concrete relations with their African-American counterparts, despite their interest in doing so. Any attempt to

¹²¹ Ibid. p.198-9 (quoted from Arthur: *The People’s Democracy*). This quote is out of context with the general argument made by Arthur that the PD was a part of the international New Left movement. While Purdie has taken into account Arthur’s assessment of early 1968, he has not done so of Arthur’s analysis of the second half of that year. See the quote by Arthur on page 45. Paul Arthur: *The People’s Democracy* (1974), p.20-22.

¹²² Ibid. p.245

break rank with their Irish-American hosts, however—who happened to be politically conservative and militantly republican—would have led the Northern Ireland activists to sacrifice the most significant support base they had outside the United Kingdom.¹²³ As Wilson concludes:

Although the American Congress for Irish Freedom was genuinely concerned about civil rights in Ulster, Heaney and his associates saw the issue primarily as a vehicle for achieving Irish unification. They hoped that unfavorable publicity over anti-Catholic discrimination would push the British government into severing ties with Northern Ireland. [...] Indeed, there were a few old republicans who had been forced to cross the Atlantic after the Civil War in the 1920s. They harbored both an intense Anglophobia and a bitterness towards the government of the Irish republic. [...] A number, ironically, opposed Martin Luther King's civil rights campaign and failed to appreciate similarities between the African Americans and Catholics in Ulster.¹²⁴

To this, Brian Dooley would add:

When [Northern Ireland] civil rights activists visited the US, they often found they were asked more questions about the border and prospects for eventual reunification than about the equal rights they were claiming as British citizens.¹²⁵

In no place does Purdie recognize the important impact that the Irish-American community had in preventing the Northern Ireland civil rights leadership from forging ties with their African-American counterparts. Although his knowledge of the domestic front is meticulously researched, Purdie might have reached different conclusions had he addressed the Irish-American context more fully.

In *Black and Green* (1998), Brian Dooley attempts to undo Purdie's suggestion that the two movements had no significant ties. Dooley's entire monograph is, in fact, a rebuttal of Purdie's conclusions on the USA-Northern Ireland connection. He writes:

¹²³ This point will be further discussed in chapter 3.

¹²⁴ Andrew J. Wilson: "The American Congress for Irish Freedom and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-70," p.65, 71

¹²⁵ Dooley: *Black and Green*, p.78.

Previous studies have minimised the role of the American influence on the Northern Ireland civil rights movement, suggesting that ties were superficial and that tactics borrowed from America were learned largely via the media. However during the years 1968 to 1972, there is significant evidence of direct, important links between the two movements.¹²⁶

The fact that Dooley focuses on the period 1968-1972 instead of 1963-69 (as does Purdie) is both illuminating and somewhat questionable. While he does unearth a number of relationships which eluded Purdie, particularly between the PD and the Black Panther Party, these connections emerged late in the movement's life, long after ideologies had crystallized and the masses had taken to the streets. Inversely, Purdie has almost entirely avoided dealing with the period of the early Troubles, possibly because the principal focus of his research—the moderate nationalists—had by then abandoned the mass movement. This may explain why the two authors are seemingly at odds.

Drawing insufficient nuance between the moderates and radicals, Dooley concludes:

When the civil rights activists of Northern Ireland first began to protest about discrimination they followed the model of the American movement, copied its tactics, and met with some of its leaders. But the black American influence on the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland during the 1960s has been largely underplayed, even in the best accounts of the period.¹²⁷

Some of Dooley's evidence is noteworthy, such as Farrell's admiration for John Lewis and Stokeley Carmichael of the SNCC.¹²⁸ However, much of Dooley's "significant evidence of direct, important links" is circumstantial and not sufficiently supported to be considered groundbreaking.

It has been acknowledged that the Northern Ireland civil rights movement was affected by international events. The extent of that influence, however, differs widely from one text to another. While the authors discussed in this section have looked beyond Irish

¹²⁶ Ibid. p.49

¹²⁷ Ibid. p.3

¹²⁸ Ibid. p.55, 59 (Interview by Dooley with Michael Farrell in 1996.)

shores for the causes of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement, each has unfortunately focused too narrowly on one international aspect in a form of tunnel-vision, never fully addressing the broader picture. The problem of tunnel vision is demonstrated in the fact that both Dooley and Purdie, the two most significant researchers of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement, have focused exclusively upon the American connection and ignored all other non-Irish contexts, such as sub-Saharan Africa.¹²⁹ Owen Dudley Edwards has alone given any weight to this possibility. Paul Arthur has demonstrated the influence of the European New Left on the People's Democracy, but fitting with the narrow scope of his research, he does not delve into any other aspect of the movement except for the PD. Interestingly, little has been said by any of these authors concerning the impact of international economics (the Anglo-Irish free trade agreement and the growth of the European Economic Community, for instance) and the growing power of multinational corporations in Ireland. As we shall see in chapter 4, such issues did significantly impact the ideology of many civil rights leaders.

The following chapters will demonstrate that the Northern Ireland civil rights movement—by virtue of its being a loose confederation of constitutional nationalists, moderate Marxist republicans, and New Left radicals—found much of its inspiration in the world beyond Ireland, albeit from different and often contradictory sources. As we shall see, the world that came to Northern Ireland in the late sixties was a curious and confusing mixture of American civil rights, postcolonial African conflict, East European

¹²⁹ The writings of Conn McCluskey, Fred Heatley, and a number of speeches delivered during the period (e.g.: by Gerry Fitt and Joe McCann) suggest that the South African apartheid regime and the racialist Rhodesian regime of Ian Smith were important concerns for the civil rights leadership. See Chapter 3.

anti-imperialism, West European economics, radical student politics, and a gamut of foreign revolutionary movements.

CHAPTER 3 THE HARP: CONSTITUTIONAL NATIONALISTS AND ‘THE WHITE NEGRO’

*How much longer must we—can we—tolerate a situation where a large section of the population of this state is being refused 20th-century democratic rights, is being treated as second-class citizens? At a period in history when peoples everywhere are demanding equality and justice, are we to be content with any less?*¹³⁰

*We, the white-skinned negroes of Ireland demand equal rights, just like the Africans of Rhodesia. [...] The cruelty of [police in Derry] placed this Irish city alongside Chicago, Little Rock, and Sharpeville.*¹³¹

During the period 1945-1965, partly as a result of the war effort, the nature of Cold War politics, and the proliferation of mass media, Northern Ireland witnessed a significant and rapid growth of interest in things foreign. This trend was facilitated by easier access to air travel, cheaper and faster commutes to Britain and America, the growing influence of American pop culture, and, especially the 1944 Butler Education Act. This Act, which ensured free access to higher education, had a significant impact in improving the social mobility and political awareness of young working class Catholics, many of whom hailed from some of the North’s poorest neighbourhoods.

Some authors have noted the important influence of television in fomenting civil rights activism following the 5 October 1968 Derry march¹³²; others have demonstrated how television, following that march, brought the ‘Northern Ireland Problem’ to the attention

¹³⁰ Austin Currie, speech at Murlough, Co. Antrim, 2 August 1967. Reprinted in Currie: *All Hell Will Break Loose* (2004), p.85.

¹³¹ Campaign for Social Justice: *Campaign Newsletter*, 27 December 1968.

¹³² Roger D. Scott has noted: “television largely determined the tactics of the civil rights movement [...] the medium was only performing its function of gathering information judged to be of widespread influence.” Scott: “Ulster in Perspective: The Relevance of Non-European Experience,” *Australian Outlook*, No. 23 (December 1969).

of the wider world.¹³³ Strangely, little interest has been shown thus far in what Northern Ireland was watching, reading, or discussing leading up to that fateful day.

For the first four decades of Northern Ireland's existence, traditional nationalism—a mixture of conservative separatism, Catholic pietism and the celebration of the Celtic past—was the dominant ideology among Northern Ireland Catholics. Some espoused the militant republicanism of IRA/Sinn Féin, but most adhered to the conservative Nationalist Party. To young Northern Catholics of the baby boom generation, however, the conservative nationalism of their parents, of the clergy, and of traditional Catholic elites¹³⁴ seemed vastly out of touch with the modern world they encountered in school books, debating societies, travels, and on television. As Ciaran McKeown noted,

I regarded both Unionism and Nationalism as much the same thing, anachronisms in an age of interdependence. [...] I was a 'republican' only in the universal sense of regarding every citizen as equal in rights, and a democrat in the same sense.¹³⁵

Identifying themselves with creed, blood, and dead Irish heroes no longer made much sense to numerous children of the post-war era growing up in an increasingly interdependent and multicultural world. The deeply segregated society which they were poised to inherit had changed little since the days of partition, but the worldview of young Northern Catholics was changing rapidly in reaction to changes in the world beyond Irish shores. Discriminatory practices such as gerrymandering, preferential hiring

¹³³ See works by Guelke (1988), A.J. Wilson (1994), and Dooley (1998).

¹³⁴ Catholic institutions such as newspapers and fraternal secret societies exerted strong influence over Northern Catholic communities. Austin Currie suggests the Ancient Order of Hibernians had a profound impact on the politics of the Nationalist Party (Currie: *All Hell Will Break Loose*, passim.). Conn McCluskey remarked that the major pro-Catholic newspapers of Northern Ireland, and specifically the *Irish News*, "weren't too keen on us and there was a sort of suggestion that because we were in the left wing that we were kind of communists and they didn't like that so we got very little support." Conn and Patricia McCluskey, interviewed by Sarah Ward (1993), in Ward: *The Genesis of Civil Rights in Northern Ireland* (1993), p.101.

¹³⁵ Ciaran McKeown: *The Passion of Peace* (1984), p.27. McKeown was a founding member of People's Democracy, but unlike Farrell, Devlin, McCann, and Boyle, he was a pacifist and an advocate of moderation and constitutional reform. McKeown had previously been president of the New Ireland Society at Queen's University and a leading figure in student politics there.

practices and the arbitrary allocation of public housing may have been tolerated—encouraged even—by their parents and ancestors. Such practices, however, were now being challenged by the international rhetoric of civil rights, constitutional democracy, and national liberation coming out of America and the developing world. These foreign concepts influenced many young nationalists and fundamentally altered their perspective on the nature of discrimination at home. It should therefore not be surprising that so many future leaders of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement emerged from this young generation of forward-looking young Catholics. Breaking with the past meant also embracing the present, which to the younger generation meant lending one's support for decolonization and democratization movements around the world.

I. THE IMPACT OF THE AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT

The nineteen sixties saw many young Northern Catholics shift their allegiance away from the conservative and past-obsessing nationalist elite—namely the Nationalist Party—to favour a secular, inclusive, and constitutionally proactive form of nationalism that was compatible with progressive social-democratic values. The civil rights movement was to be the vehicle through which this change occurred, and the 1963 Dungannon housing protest was to mark the official start of this process. The Homeless Citizens' League (HCL), which brought the respected middle-class couple, Conn and Pat McCluskey, out of obscurity to form the Campaign for Social Justice, represented a significant change in the political culture of young Northern Catholics. It also marked the first major intervention of women into the Northern Ireland political sphere—an

almost exclusively male world at the time.¹³⁶ More importantly, the Dungannon housing protest set the stage for a decade of comparisons linking the Catholics of Northern Ireland to the world's foremost victims of discrimination: American, South African and Rhodesian 'negroes'. The HCL borrowed the reformist language of the early American civil rights movement and remained virtually silent on traditional nationalist grievances such as the border.

The 1963 Dungannon housing protest marked the beginning of a period during which Northern Ireland Catholics shifted their glance away from traditional sources of inspiration (such as historical heroes, Catholic practice, the injustices of past centuries, or the government of the Irish Republic) towards elements of the contemporary non-Irish world. To wit, the Fairmount Park Squatters of Dungannon did not chant about partition, complain about the Famine, or heap abuses upon the Protestant faith; their focus was on the American 'negro' and the social conditions which poor Irish Catholics seemed to have in common with them as a result of their difference. In 1963, Alabama and Mississippi experienced their hot long summers of civil rights marches, freedom rides, and lunch-counter sit-ins. On 28 August 1963, in the midst of the HCL protest, Martin Luther King Jr. uttered his internationally televised "I Have a Dream" speech.¹³⁷ Consequently, the HCL protestors used expressions such as "Racial Discrimination in

¹³⁶ See Mary Kathryn Bolster: *Women on the March: Women in the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland in the 1960s* (1991). M.A. Thesis, National University of Ireland, Dublin.

¹³⁷ Martin Luther King, Jr. was incarcerated for his public stand against segregation in Birmingham, and subsequently wrote his famous "Letter from a Birmingham Jail" (see quote on p.ix). Following this, the University of Alabama was desegregated and President Kennedy announced his intention to end segregation in the South with a civil rights bill. In late August, while Dungannon squatters occupied the condemned estate houses of Fairmount Park, news of the 250,000-strong civil rights march on Washington reached Northern Ireland households. African-American activists, such as the socialist Bayard Rustin and student radical John Lewis (SNCC) spoke at a subsequent rally, as did Dr. King, pronouncing his landmark speech "I have a Dream".

Alabama Hits Dungannon,¹³⁸ “Ship us to Little Rock,”¹³⁹ “Pals from Alabama,”¹⁴⁰ and “White Negroes,”¹⁴¹ to uphold their cause. A number of newspaper articles and editorials supporting the housing protest also borrowed heavily from the American civil rights example. The Dungannon protest set the trend for future civil rights demonstrations with comparisons between Northern Catholics and African-Americans by borrowing expressions such as ‘civil rights,’ ‘discrimination,’ ‘segregation’ and ‘apartheid’,¹⁴² and by using direct-action tactics inspired by the American model.¹⁴³

The self-perception of Northern Catholics as ‘white negroes’ spread throughout the province as a result of developments in America. One Dungannon councilman, Jim Corrigan, expressed his solidarity with the housing protestors with these words:

Perhaps the issue which has been so powerfully underlined in Washington this week by the marchers can be better appreciated in the North of Ireland [...] One of the most impressive pictures of the Washington demonstration showed a black hand and a white hand clasped in friendship and in common purpose [...] How long until we see an Orange and a Green hand symbolizing a common bond?¹⁴⁴

The ‘white negro’ rhetoric became a recurring theme in the Northern Ireland press, and would be used by all shades of civil rights supporters.¹⁴⁵ An editorial of 18 May 1963, for instance, called for the launching of a ‘freedom bus’ to tour England—loosely inspired on the freedom rides taking place in Mississippi and Alabama at the time—to

¹³⁸ *Dungannon Observer*, 18 May 1963.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰ *Dungannon Observer*, 15 June 1963.

¹⁴¹ *Dungannon Observer*, 7 September 1963.

¹⁴² The publications of the Campaign for Social Justice drew heavily from the American and African experience of segregation/apartheid. See for example CSJ: *Northern Ireland: The Plain Truth* (1964).

¹⁴³ In January 1964, homeless Derry Catholics launched an illegal squat at the Springtown prefabs, a former U.S. military base slated for demolition. The *Derry Journal* proclaimed: “Derry’s Little Rock Asks for Fair Play.” 31 January 1964, quoted in Brian Dooley: *Black and Green* (1998), p.30.

¹⁴⁴ *Dungannon Observer*, 31 August 1963.

¹⁴⁵ See *Dungannon Observer*: 7 September 1963 (letter), and *Irish News*: 21 October, 18 November, and 5 December 1968.

sensitize the English population to the ills of segregation in Northern Ireland.¹⁴⁶ A number of letters to the editor drew a powerful connection between black civil rights protestors in America and the Catholics of Ulster: “I have been viewing the American negroes’ fight for equal rights,” said one unsigned letter to the *Dungannon Observer*,

and have come to the conclusion that we, the Catholic people in the Six Counties, are in the same position as those people. We are classed as white negroes by the Unionist clique in regard to housing, jobs, votes, etc.¹⁴⁷

In the years to come, such comparisons continued unabated. On 24 June 1968, following his brief illegal squat that set off the civil rights mass movement, Nationalist MP Austin Currie declared:

The situation in Northern Ireland is the same as that in the southern states of the USA or that in South Africa, the sole difference being that discrimination in Northern Ireland is based on religion rather than colour.¹⁴⁸

National Democratic Party leader Joe McCann, speaking at a rally following the 24 August 1968 march, declared:

We of the minority might be excused if we feel a bond of fellowship with the negro community in the American South, with the victims of apartheid in South Africa or the deprived peoples of Mr. Ian Smith’s Rhodesia. [...] One has the feeling that if the Northern Ireland cabinet were transferred to Rhodesia, or Cape Town, or Alabama they would feel quite at home. [...] Are we so different, or yet again so inferior, to the coloured peoples that we do not attract the attention or concern from this liberal-minded British government? [...] Is the philosophy ‘No Catholics need apply’ so different from that of ‘No coloureds need apply’?¹⁴⁹

Comparing the Unionist Party with the American Ku Klux Klan also became popular, whether by moderate MPs like Harry Diamond¹⁵⁰ and Gerry Fitt¹⁵¹ or by republican

¹⁴⁶ *Dungannon Observer*, 18 May 1963.

¹⁴⁷ *Dungannon Observer*, 7 September 1963.

¹⁴⁸ *Irish News*, 24 June 1968.

¹⁴⁹ *Irish News*, 26 August 1968

¹⁵⁰ See *Irish Weekly*, 11 March 1967.

¹⁵¹ See *Irish Times*, 2 April 1969, reprinted in CSJ: *Northern Ireland: The Plain Truth* (1969).

radicals such as Finnbar O’Doherty.¹⁵² As civil rights demands met with greater resistance from known Orangemen and Apprentice Boys, the movement’s supporters increasingly accused their unionist opponents not merely of sectarianism, but of *racism* against Catholics—a previously foreign concept in Nationalist rhetoric. In early 1968, Stormont Liberal MP Sheelagh Murnaghan initiated legislation for a civil rights bill reminiscent of the one recently adopted by the American Congress. It called for the establishment of a human rights commission and for a guarantee of racial equality between Catholics and Protestants.¹⁵³ The bill died stillborn, drawing the ire and derision of numerous Unionists who could not conceive of Ulster as having a racial problem.¹⁵⁴

The tactics of the American civil rights movement were observed very early on in Northern Ireland. Illegal squats were, for obvious reasons, a natural choice to protest unfair public housing allocation, but the desire to emulate the American civil rights example by marching existed as early as 1963. A September 1963 letter titled “Next Step—A March on Dungannon?” stated:

No doubt, following recent Negro example in Washington, one of the next steps in the campaign will be a march on the town in which all victims of discrimination and all sympathisers will take part...¹⁵⁵

Another letter titled “‘White Negroes’ In the Six Counties” asked, “can we not organise an Irish citizens’ organisation and demand our rights?”¹⁵⁶

It would take another five years before direct-action mass-protest became a reality in Northern Ireland, but it was not for lack of interest. Older, more cautious moderates with a following—such as the McCluskeys and MP Gerry Fitt—had committed themselves to

¹⁵² Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh: *Ulster’s White Negroes: From Civil Rights to Insurrection* (1994), p.51.

¹⁵³ Campaign for Social Justice: *Campaign Newsletter*, 14 March 1969.

¹⁵⁴ See Terrence O’Neill: *Ulster at the Crossroads* (1969), p.127.

¹⁵⁵ *Dungannon Observer*, 7 September 1963.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

exploring all legal and parliamentary channels available to them, while the younger generation of nationalists—Currie, Hume, McKeown, Boyle, and the PD radicals—had not yet risen to positions of influence. By the summer of 1968 when Currie instigated the mass direct-action campaign, all alternative channels had been explored and found to be closed. The stage was set for a natural progression from legal and Parliamentary action to street politics.

Whether or not the crowds that massed at Coalisland on 24 August 1968 for the province's first civil rights march were familiar with the tactics of non-violent direct-action used in America, the leaders of the new movement certainly were. As NICRA's Fred Heatley recalls,

In the spring of 1968 [...] the tactics of Martin Luther King in America had been absorbed inasmuch that it was felt by some that only by public marches could we really draw world attention to what we were trying to achieve by normal democratic means.¹⁵⁷

The singing of "We Shall Overcome" was shaky and improvised at first, marked with outburst of militant republican choruses, demonstrating that not all who mobilized for civil rights understood the internationalist vision of the march organisers.¹⁵⁸ Nonetheless, the American protest song would become, by November of the same year, a rousing anthem at Derry Citizens Action Committee (DCAC) protests. The members of PD had by then already demonstrated their familiarity with non-violent direct-action from the moment they took to the streets on 9 October 1968, responding to loyalist taunts not with nationalist slogans and counter-violence, but with a sit-down strike at Shaftsbury Square.

¹⁵⁷ Fred Heatley: "The Early Marches," the second of five articles on the civil rights movement by the former NICRA treasurer. *Fortnight*, 5 April 1974, p.9. Heatley and the CSJ's John McAnerney were, with Austin Currie, the initiators of the 24 August march from Coalisland to Dungannon.

¹⁵⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 29 August 1968.

II. CIVIL RIGHTS AND THE IRISH-AMERICAN COMMUNITY

Bob Purdie has suggested that “the Black civil rights movement in the United States [...] was not a model,” because of a lack of evidence to show that

any of the founders or leaders of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement ever visited the Southern United States, consulted with any of the Black civil rights organisations, or ever undertook a thorough study of that movement.¹⁵⁹

He adds, in a subsequent interview with the *Irish Times*, that

there is no evidence that anyone ever thought of going over to the U.S. [where] they would have learned the tactics and strategy of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference under Martin Luther King.¹⁶⁰

In drawing this somewhat short-sighted conclusion, Purdie has not taken into account the inhibiting influence of the Irish-American community.¹⁶¹

Many nationalists in Northern Ireland found inspiration in the words and image of President John F. Kennedy, the brash young Irish-American with an open heart for minority rights. His progressive and secular leadership as a Catholic statesman led a number of civil rights activists in Northern Ireland to express admiration for the man. As Ciaran McKeown remembers:

With his thrilling rhetoric and youthful charisma, he appealed immediately to ‘a new generation, born in this century.’ [...] He brought above all, hope, and spoke to and for our generation more than any politician alive...¹⁶²

Austin Currie, speaking with his back to a police blockade during the 24 August 1968 civil rights march to Dungannon, compared himself to Kennedy at the Berlin Wall.¹⁶³

Earlier that same year, McKeown met with Bobby Kennedy while visiting the United

¹⁵⁹ Bob Purdie: *Politics in the Streets* (1990), p.245.

¹⁶⁰ “Driving Passions for Justice” (an interview with Bob Purdie), *Irish News*, 15 September 1990.

¹⁶¹ He seems to have utterly disregarded the significant influence of Black Power activists such as John Lewis of the SNCC, and of radical Marxist activists in the Black Panther Party.

¹⁶² McKeown: *The Passion of Peace*, p.4.

¹⁶³ *Irish News*, 26 August 1968.

States.¹⁶⁴ In October 1963, Conn and Pat McCluskey received a visit from the American Ambassador to the Republic of Ireland,¹⁶⁵ but the untimely death of the President in November crushed their hopes that he openly support the civil rights cause in Northern Ireland. In 1972, Conn McCluskey finally managed to present his case against the Unionists to Senator Edward Kennedy and the American House of Representatives' Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe. This was unfortunately far too late to prevent the rising tide of violence that now surged across Northern Ireland. While the Kennedys were characterised by an aura of tolerance and openness, they represented, in actual fact, only a minority of the Irish American community.

Many of the Irish-Americans whom McCluskey, Fitt, and Currie visited were either apathetic or downright hostile to the thought of supporting a 'civil rights' campaign in Northern Ireland. The American civil rights movement had not enthused a great number of them either, especially Richard Daley, the influential Mayor of Chicago.¹⁶⁶ Irish-Americans were still in many cases fiercely republican (in the Irish sense) and did not easily sympathize with the constitutional ambivalence of Northern Ireland's civil rights organizations. But to raise the necessary funds to support civil rights activities in Northern Ireland, and to finance their case before the European Commission on Human Rights, the nationalist activists of Northern Ireland desperately needed to enlist the lucrative aid of their traditional allies across the Atlantic. Irish-Americans did respond by providing some funds, but also with calls for a renewed armed campaign against partition.

¹⁶⁴ McKeown, *The Passion of Peace*, p.36.

¹⁶⁵ *Dungannon Observer*, 12 October 1963.

¹⁶⁶ See Ralph: *Northern Protest* (1993) and Dooley: *Black and Green* (1998).

From the very beginning, the relationship between the Irish-Americans and visiting civil rights activists from Northern Ireland—even the most radical ones—proved exceedingly problematic. Student activist Eilis McDermot, for instance, wrote:

I incurred the wrath of one Irish county association by mentioning the slums on the [Protestant] Shankill Road as well as the [Catholic] Falls road, our attitude being that the relationship of the Protestant working class to the Catholic working class was that of 'three ha'pence looking down on a penny'.¹⁶⁷

Austin Currie received no better a reception during his 1969 visit to America:

I was soon to find out, like so many Irish politicians before and after me, that the Irish-American political scene was akin to walking through a minefield, and even comparatively minor political differences at home were magnified across the Atlantic.¹⁶⁸

On the same trip, a quarter of the audience walked out on Irish journalist Connor Cruise O'Brien when he urged his Irish-American cousins to support the African-American struggle at home. Conn McCluskey expressed his impatience with these "Irish-Americans of the traditional type," calling them "years behind the time", "bigoted", and "stupid."¹⁶⁹ Even Cathal Goulding, the IRA chief of staff, had difficulty convincing the Irish-American grass roots to sponsor non-violent civil rights agitation in the Six Counties:

In 1964 [...] I spent three or four weeks in America with the Clann na Gael. [...] The reaction I got there was that they couldn't support us financially unless there was some form of revolutionary activity, particularly military activity actually going on in Ireland. [...] We'd have taken money from anyone, but we didn't get the support we needed from America. [...] They wouldn't support political or agitational activities in Ireland.¹⁷⁰

And finally, as Bernadette Devlin MP remarked of her 1969 visit to the US:

¹⁶⁷ Eilis McDermott: "Law and Disorder," in Michael Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On* (1988), p.152.

¹⁶⁸ Currie: *All Hell Will Break Loose*, p.122.

¹⁶⁹ Conn McCluskey, interview with W.H. Van Voris in *Northern Ireland: An Oral Documentary* (1975), p.53.

¹⁷⁰ Interview with Cathal Goulding: "The New Strategy of the IRA," *New Left Review*, No.64 (November-December 1970), p.58.

I was not long there until, like water, I found my level. ‘My people’—the people who knew about oppression, discrimination, prejudice, poverty and the frustration and despair that they produced—were not Irish Americans. They were black, Puerto Rican, Chicano. And those who were supposed to be ‘my people’, the Irish Americans [...] looked and sounded to me like Orangemen. They said exactly the same things about blacks that the loyalists said about us at home.¹⁷¹

In late 1969, Devlin was to be the first to spurn the dependence of Northern Ireland civil rights activists on their traditional Irish-American support base. Calling them “racists, bigots, and capitalists,”¹⁷² she reached across the colour barrier by meeting with members of the Black Panther Party. She snubbed a meeting with Chicago’s Mayor Daley in the process and received the nickname “Red Bernie” from the Irish-American press.¹⁷³

Though the radical socialist Devlin proved more extreme in her actions than did Currie, McClusky and Fitt, her nationalist fellow protestors, all shared the same frustrations in regards to the Irish-American community.

One of the greatest Irish-American allies of civil rights-minded Northern nationalists was the Irish-American attorney James Heaney. He was also, in many ways, their greatest liability. Heaney was the founder and president of the American Congress for Irish Freedoms (ACIF), a public relations and pressure group for the advancement of Irish unity. Heaney’s militant republicanism outweighed his dedication to the Northern Irish civil rights cause; he saw the civil rights campaign primarily as a vehicle to bring about the reunification of Ireland. He “has been described by some as ‘a mad

¹⁷¹ Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey: “A Peasant in the Halls of the Great,” in Michael Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On* (1988), p.87.

¹⁷² *Irish-American Reporter*, July 1969. Reprinted in A.J. Wilson: “The American Congress for Irish Freedom and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-70,” *Eire-Ireland*, Vol. 29, No. 1 (1994), p.72.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.* p.72

republican’,” stated the *Irish News*, not entirely disapproving of the label.¹⁷⁴ While the Campaign for Social Justice and NICRA proclaimed their official neutrality on constitutional issues, Heaney often spoke out in favour of ending partition. He even launched a smear campaign in the US aimed at the British government, and pressured the NICRA leadership to establish an “exile Ulster government in New York”.¹⁷⁵ Heaney also called on the Spanish government to launch a joint Irish-Spanish campaign to wrestle Northern Ireland and Gibraltar simultaneously from British control. He wrote to the Spanish Ambassador in Washington, stating in the name of the civil rights movement:

Our ultimate objective is the expulsion of Britain from Northern Ireland. The present civil rights movement is merely one step in that direction. [...] The present agitation is aimed at the expulsion of British authority. Those supporting the British government in Belfast are actually Englishmen who were planted in Ireland 300 years ago. They’re neither Irish in blood or outlook.¹⁷⁶

The ACIF was the primary vehicle through which Northern Ireland activists could reach an American audience. It was instrumental in the organization of Irish speaking tours to the US, but such visits were usually geared towards a conservative Irish-American audience that had little interest in social democratic reforms, whether abroad or at home. Establishing greater solidarity between Irish civil rights activists and African-American ones was decidedly not one of its priorities.

While the help of the Irish-American community was sought very early on by the civil rights leadership, its hostile predisposition towards British rule in Northern Ireland and

¹⁷⁴ *Irish News*, 31 July 1968. The nationalist *Irish News* offered favourable press to most moderate elements of the civil rights movement, but Heaney was decidedly not one of them (see also 23, 24 September and 8, 14 October 1968).

¹⁷⁵ Correspondence from James Heaney to Conn McCluskey, 6 May 1969. See Wilson: “The American Congress for Irish Freedom and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-70,” p.65.

¹⁷⁶ Correspondence from James Heaney to the Spanish ambassador in Washington, 19 December 1969. In Wilson: “The American Congress for Irish Freedoms and the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement, 1967-70,” p.66.

towards the African-American community at home proved instead to be a hindrance to the advancement of peaceful civil rights in Northern Ireland.

III. SOUTH AFRICA AND RHODESIA

The impact of African events on the Northern Ireland civil rights movement has been largely ignored by the existing literature. Yet, the emancipation struggles of African nationalists, and particularly of South African and Rhodesian blacks, struck a familiar chord to the Northern Ireland advocates of civil rights. News of South Africa and Southern Rhodesia¹⁷⁷ appeared frequently in the Northern Ireland media during the sixties, given their position as former British colonies and exclusivist white minority regimes, and given also the ongoing struggles of the Wilson government in the U.K. to break down the racist structure of these states. While British Prime Minister Harold Wilson made little visible effort to tackle discrimination in Ulster,¹⁷⁸ news from Africa incited Northern Catholics to compare themselves all the more with oppressed blacks in that continent, leading them also to insist that Wilson pay greater attention to the problem of discrimination in his own country.¹⁷⁹

The enforcement of segregation laws by Hendrik Verwoerd's white South African regime, the massacre of black protestors at Sharpeville in March 1960, and the withdrawal of that country from the British Commonwealth (with the climate of civil war that followed), all had a significant impact on the supporters of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. Housing allocation, voting restrictions, and the Northern Ireland

¹⁷⁷ The former British colony of Rhodesia now exists as Zimbabwe (south) and Zambia (north).

¹⁷⁸ See Wilson's memoirs, in which Northern Ireland, before the 1969 escalation of violence, is virtually ignored and in which the Rhodesian problem is a recurring theme throughout. Harold Wilson: *The Labour Government 1964-1970: A Personal Record* (1971).

¹⁷⁹ See *Irish News*, 9, 16 September and 14 November 1968; and *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 December 1968.

Special Powers Act became widely compared to the repressive apartheid laws which kept South African blacks under the foot of the white minority. In early 1963, an editorial in the *Dungannon Observer* noted:

I noticed that drastic, ‘No Trial’ Bill, which will give South African Police power to hold suspects without warrant for ninety days, has been steam-rolled through Parliament. [...] The British Press has a penchant towards crusading strongly on behalf of peoples who are persecuted several thousand miles away. The spasmodic uproars about racial injustices in Africa, Asia, and points further East, always seem a shade mystifying, when that same bellowing Press cocks its emotional snout at a Special Powers Act operating on its own doorstep.¹⁸⁰

The Campaign for Social Justice also condemned “the Government of Northern Ireland’s policies of apartheid” in its official launch statement of 18 January 1964.¹⁸¹ In the following years, the CSJ made numerous claims that Unionist-controlled councils in areas with large Catholic populations—and the Dungannon Urban Council was particularly guilty of this—practiced ‘apartheid’ in their distribution of public housing. It also reported that

the South African Minister of Justice introduced a new Coercion Bill by saying that he ‘would be willing to exchange all the legislation of this sort for one clause of the Northern Ireland Special Powers Act.’¹⁸²

The Orange Order’s power over Northern Ireland, claimed the same tract, has “many points of similarity to the Dutch Reformed Church on South Africa.”¹⁸³

A few visiting South Africans also highlighted the skewed nature of Northern Irish democracy. Interviewed by the *Belfast Telegraph*, Deborah Lavin—a visiting PhD student, South African Liberal, and opponent of the Verwoerd regime—was astounded by the number of electoral irregularities she saw perpetrated in Northern Ireland. “She

¹⁸⁰ *Dungannon Observer*, 18 May 1963.

¹⁸¹ *Irish News*, 18 January 1964. The CSJ Press Release of 14 January 1964 is reprinted in Conn McCluskey: *Up Off Their Knees* (1989).

¹⁸² Campaign For Social Justice: *Northern Ireland: The Plain Truth* (1964), p.2.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.* p.2

was amazed,” read the widely publicised article, “when an apparently respectable citizen told her: ‘I voted 36 times.’”¹⁸⁴ Kader Asmal—a South-African Indian, a law lecturer at Trinity College, Dublin, and the President of the Irish anti-apartheid movement—was the featured speaker at the August 1966 Wolfe Tone Society meeting which launched the birth of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association. Asmal’s topic was Human Rights in an international perspective.¹⁸⁵

Like the 1963 events of Alabama and Washington that acted as a backdrop to the Dungannon housing protest, racial discrimination in Africa helped mobilize a second wave of civil rights activity in the summer of 1968. This time, however, it was the declaration of a South African legislator, claiming that apartheid laws in his own country were less severe than Northern Ireland’s Special Powers Act, that caused the initial spark. The story was repeated by a number of newspapers and civil rights publications in Northern Ireland.¹⁸⁶ The civil rights movement had its own local grievances, of course, but it now held seemingly damning evidence to prove that Northern Ireland had joined repressive, racist regimes such as South Africa among the world’s most shameful perpetrators of injustice. ‘Apartheid’ in Northern Ireland was thus a salient concern in the months that followed the 24 August 1968 march.

The situation in Rhodesia made an even deeper impact on Northern Ireland civil rights supporters. After all, Prime Minister Wilson’s attempts to pressure changes in Ian Smith’s racist regime were widely seen and read, and the Southern Rhodesian prime minister’s threat to resort to a unilateral declaration of independence was not far removed

¹⁸⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 December 1965. This story was reprinted in CSJ: *The Plain Truth* (1969) to emphasize the paucity of Northern Ireland electoral laws.

¹⁸⁵ Fred Heatley: “The Beginning 1964—Feb.1968,” *Fortnight*, 22 March 1974, p.10.

¹⁸⁶ See for instance, *Belfast Telegraph*, 20 July 1968; CSJ: *Northern Ireland: The Plain Truth* (1968); and Bernadette Devlin’s *The Price of My Soul* (1969), p.118.

from the declarations of some ultra-Unionists at home. Northern Ireland Home Affairs Minister Bill Craig, for instance, had let the idea float on numerous occasions that Ulster might be better off on its own than under a belligerent British government. “Northern Ireland’s franchise laws are the envy of Mr. Smith,” added MP Gerry Fitt, exhorting the Wilson government to make no distinctions between Rhodesian blacks and Northern Ireland Catholics.¹⁸⁷ The Campaign for Social Justice also called for Wilson’s rapid intervention:

The President of the United States was not content with words when social justice was set at Alabama [...] In Algiers, General de Gaulle moved from words to acts. [...] The British Government intervened decisively in Rhodesia [...] It can and should intervene in Northern Ireland to redress the injustices caused by Orange ascendancy.¹⁸⁸

Similar requests were made by Joe McCann, Patricia McCluskey, John Hume, Michael Farrell and even the supportive English Marxist, Tariq Ali.¹⁸⁹ Finally, as Conn McCluskey was to point out in 1972 to a committee of US congressmen:

There are many similarities between the Ulster government and Mr. Smith’s Government of Rhodesia. Differences where they exist are mainly of degree. [...] Like Rhodesia, Northern Ireland suffers gross job discrimination. In Rhodesia the way it is effected is that Africans are not given adequate education. The educational opportunities are simply not allowed to exist. In Northern Ireland there are educational opportunities, but the discrimination has continued so long now that well qualified Catholics do not even bother to apply for good jobs. The end result in both cases is the same. [...] Both Rhodesia and Northern Ireland operate the ghetto system and [...] incorporate with it the denial of votes to householders.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ *Irish Weekly*, 4 March 1967.

¹⁸⁸ Campaign For Social Justice: *Northern Ireland’s Divided Community* (1968), p.2.

¹⁸⁹ For McCann, see *Irish News*, 26 August 1968; for McCluskey, see *Irish News*, 9 September 1968; for Hume, see *Irish News*, 7 February 1969, 24 January 1970, and *Sunday News*, 11 October 1970; for Farrell, see *Struggle in the North* (1972), p.32; for Ali, see *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 January 1969. See also an anonymous letter to the *Irish News*, 14 November 1968 and a *Sunday Express* story comparing the two countries, as reported by the *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 December 1968.

¹⁹⁰ McCluskey: “Aspects of the Problem of the Politico-Religious Minority,” Statement given to the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Hearings on Northern Ireland (February 28, 29, March 1, 1972), United States House of Representatives, p.18-19.

IV: CONSTITUTIONAL NATIONALISM AND THE WORLD BEYOND

The new brand of nationalism which emerged in Northern Ireland during the years of civil rights agitation was founded on the ideas of (mostly) young, educated middle class Catholics. It was an outright rejection of the Nationalist Party's patronizing conservatism and ambiguous separatism. Prominent nationalists within the movement—McClusky, Currie, Hume, Cooper, Fitt, Joe McCann, and McKeown—were for the most part middle-class progressives who valued non-sectarian, social democratic collaboration. In this they were highly influenced, as we have seen, by the international discourse of racial equality and human rights. Inspired by the integrationist speeches of African-American activists such as Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bayard Rustin, they believed that the citizens of Northern Ireland were slated to become, with greater democratic rights for all, less predisposed to sectarian and revolutionary action. As Conn McCluskey wrote, "the negro civil rights leader, Bayard Rustin's aphorism summed it all up when he said 'People who feel a part of the structure do not attack it.'"¹⁹¹ The civil rights movement was to be, in the eyes of these new nationalists, a vehicle to empower Catholics and give them the ability to solve their constitutional problems peacefully and democratically.

On 5 April 1968, the McCluskeys' Campaign for Social Justice lodged its first case with the European Commission on Human Rights.¹⁹² The cost and workload of maintaining this course of action proved overwhelming for the CSJ, but the appeal to the concept of universal human rights remained present in the speeches and actions of numerous civil rights leaders. John Hume, for instance, made numerous public references to the International Declaration of Human Rights, and read the document

¹⁹¹ Conn McCluskey: *Up Off Their Knees*, p.73.

¹⁹² *Irish News*, 13 July 1968.

publicly at several rallies.¹⁹³ At the movement's sidelines, Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer tried to embrace this trend, if only too late to preserve his seat in the Stormont parliament, by using his position as leader of the official opposition to meet with United Nations Secretary General U Thant in July 1968.¹⁹⁴

The new nationalism was multicultural and inclusive in its philosophy. By couching the 'Northern Ireland problem' within the rhetoric of ethnic discrimination (rather than constitutional matters or ancient sectarian quarrels), the 'neo-nationalists' of the civil rights movement fostered the idea that all inhabitants of Northern Ireland had an equal stake and responsibility in the province's future. They tried to initiate greater cross-communal relations and to 'desectarianise', at least on their side, the constitutional debate. Though few Protestants joined their civil rights ranks or the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) which they subsequently formed, the door was decidedly left open to them. But so long as Northern Ireland remained an 'ethnically' divided society constitutional nationalists saw no need to accelerate the walk towards Irish unification. Conn and Pat McCluskey, for instance, saw their task in the civil rights movement as that of uniting Northern Ireland's divided communities, not in fomenting anti-partitionist sentiment:

We began a search among our 'own kind'. [...] Many were too nationalist to be of use. Fifty years of the same sort of agitation by the Nationalists had achieved nothing. Heated discussions about the 'border' would be a waste of time and energy. Our idea was, since we lived in a part of the United Kingdom where the British remit ran, we should seek the ordinary rights of British citizens which were obviously denied us.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ For examples, see *Irish News*, 4 November and 6 December 1968.

¹⁹⁴ *Belfast Telegraph*, 12 July 1968.

¹⁹⁵ McCluskey: *Up Off Their Knees*, p.15-16.

Ending partition, they believed, would have to occur slowly through an inclusive popular movement founded on secular and social-democratic values—the same values which they borrowed from the international discourse on human rights. This goal also reflected, in their mind, the growing trend of international collaboration affecting Europe:

When equality of opportunity is achieved, true reconciliation of the two communities will begin. This will be followed, when raw nerves have had time to heal, by the reunification of Ireland, which will play its part in a reunified Europe.¹⁹⁶

The political doctrine of constitutional nationalism was best described by John Hume in two 1964 articles which appeared in the *Irish Times*. Hume believed that the Catholic minority of Northern Ireland had hindered its own progress and well-being through abstentionist politics and sectarian prejudice. This “dangerous equation of Nationalism and Catholicism,” he wrote, “simply led to the postponement of normal politics in the area,” perpetuating the stereotype that Catholics are “politically irresponsible and immature and therefore unfit to rule.”¹⁹⁷

The crux of the matter for the younger generation is the continued existence, particularly among the Catholic community, of great social problems of housing, unemployment and emigration. It is the struggle for priority in their minds between such problems and the ideal of an United Ireland. [...] Social and economic problems [have] led to a deep questioning of traditional Nationalist attitudes. [...] Nationalists in opposition have been in no way constructive. [...] There has been no attempt to be positive, to encourage the Catholic Community to develop the resources which they have in plenty. [...] One of the greatest contributions therefore that the Catholic in Northern Ireland can make to a liberalizing of the political atmosphere would be the removal of the equation between Nationalists and Catholics.¹⁹⁸

For Hume and his entourage, the civil rights movement was therefore not strictly an end within itself. It was a doorway to the empowerment of Catholics, to a secular and

¹⁹⁶ McCluskey: “Aspects of the Problem of the Politico-Religious Minority,” p.22.

¹⁹⁷ John Hume: “The Northern Catholic,” *Irish times*, 18 and 19 May 1964.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

inclusive form of nationalism and to a gradual, non-violent and democratic end to partition.

If one wishes to create a United Ireland by constitutional means, then one must accept the constitutional position. [...] Catholics could then throw themselves fully into the solution of Northern problems without fear of recrimination. [...] A United Ireland, if it is to come, and if violence, rightly, is to be discounted, must come about by evolution, i.e.: by the will of the Northern majority [...] It will, of course, take a long time.¹⁹⁹

The civil rights movement was to the proponents of constitutional nationalism an opportunity to transform the Northern Ireland population into something new, starting with the Catholic/nationalist community. By emulating the example of non-violent direct action seen in America, by adopting the rhetoric of racial harmony and human rights, and by promoting a form of international citizenship, constitutional nationalism was not to be a simple political alternative, but the attempt to engineer a new man—a new definition of Irishness—tailored to fit the world of the late twentieth century. It is therefore not surprising that many of the promoters of this ideology—Gerry Fitt, John Hume, Austin Currie, Ivan Cooper, and Paddy Devlin—joined together in the fall of 1969, when civil rights had apparently reached a fatal roadblock, to form the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP). To this day, the SDLP has remained the primary organ of constitutional nationalism in Northern Ireland.

It was of course very easy, some would say, for financially secure members of the Catholic middle-class to think this way. They did not go home to face neighbourhood violence or dismal living conditions every night. Neither the PD's Bernadette Devlin nor the IRA Chief of Staff Cathal Goulding, both of whom ascribed to the 'white negro'

¹⁹⁹ Ibid.

thesis but not to the constitutional nationalist agenda, had much interest in the projects of the conservative middle-class elite. On this they were not alone. “The Nationalists have no intention of trying to overthrow an economic system out of which most of them are doing well,”²⁰⁰ wrote Michael Farrell in 1972.

As we shall see, the civil rights movement included a strong contingent of republicans and socialists who, though they embraced the civil rights cause, had very different views concerning the nature of discrimination.

²⁰⁰ Michael Farrell: *Struggle in the North* (1972), p.26-7.

CHAPTER 4
THE HAMMER:
RED REPUBLICANS AND THE NATIONAL LIBERATION PARADIGM

We today have been forced by circumstances to add new dimensions to our struggle for freedom, we have had to re-examine our goals in the light of today's conditions and have concluded that an attack mounted on a broad front, across cultural, economic and political fronts, promises the best hope of success in the future. [...] Historically the ending of partition has been the sole aim of our movement, since 1922, and this has been our mistake. For imperialism has many forms not least the cultural and economic take-over of underdeveloped countries such as ours. [...] The army guarded a frontier while the imperialists quietly entered by another and laid claim to Ireland.²⁰¹

The 1956-62 republican border campaign failed to rally mass support for an armed insurrection in the Six Counties. Consequently, Cathal Goulding, the new IRA chief-of-staff, believed it was time for the Dublin-based republican leadership to rethink its ideology and tactics. The republican movement had not only fallen out of touch with the masses, he concluded, it had also failed to take notice of a threat to Ireland's sovereignty greater than partition. This clear and present danger was the growing power of foreign corporations over Irish affairs, North and South, and their responsibility in perpetuating poverty, unemployment, and sectarian strife throughout the island.

While Northern Ireland's constitutional nationalists looked to America and Africa for inspiration, the new republican leadership was not overly concerned by the plight of African Americans, or that of other foreign ethnic minorities. They did, however, observe the impact which right-wing regimes and international capitalism had on workers around the world, and they did so with a great sense of dread. American corporations and the European Economic Community (EEC) were particularly to be feared, as these stood at the front lines of a looming international capitalist order threatening Irish sovereignty.

²⁰¹ Cathal Goulding: Speech at the Wolfe Tone Commemoration, Bodenstown, June 1967, in *United Irishman*, July 1967.

Left unchecked, these powers were bound to bring about the total subordination of Ireland, north and south, to foreign economic interests.

Having evolved a Marxist perspective on the Irish problem, Goulding believed that partition had not been a specifically 'Protestant' enterprise but an economic tactic, used by the moneyed elites on both sides of the Irish border, to keep the Irish working classes divided. Sectarianism, it was thought, was deliberately fomented to perpetuate working class competition and cheaper operating costs so as to attract more foreign investments. This would lead, ultimately, to increased profits for local and foreign industrialists, but to very little improvement in working-class living conditions.

In this sense, the new republican ideology had moved closer to that of Northern Ireland communists. Since members of the Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) already played an important role in the Belfast labour movement, it was imperative, thought Goulding, that the two groups collaborate more closely.

Heeding the growing demands for civil rights, the republicans under Goulding sensed an unprecedented opportunity. By setting up, and participating in, a broad civil rights coalition, they hoped to improve their visibility in the North. This would allow them to spread socialist as well as republican ideas, foster working-class solidarity, and expose the Unionist elite as the evil henchmen of the international capitalist system. The new republican leadership believed that civil rights agitation would inevitably lead to the erosion of sectarianism and to a bloodless transition—hopefully—from capitalism to socialism. If there was to be a revolution, it should come from the masses. Ultimately, a similar transition was to be engineered in the south, with the final goal of ending partition and creating a thirty-two county socialist republic.

To do this, however, the republican leadership would have to exercise a great deal of tact. It would have to convince a large number of Protestants and Catholics of its non-violent intentions, all the while maintaining the support of grass-roots republican militants. It would also need to convince them all that the true enemy of ‘the Irish People’ was not Protestant at all, nor necessarily unionist or British. Rather, the real enemy was an imperialist, profit-mongering economic system, made up of Unionists in the North, Neo-Unionists in the Republic, and the harbingers of free trade in Europe and America who had everything to gain from open relations with a politically divided and economically docile Ireland.

I. THE NEW REPUBLICAN LEADERSHIP AND THE NEO-IMPERIALIST THREAT

Under the heavy influence of Cathal Goulding (IRA), Tomas MacGiolla (Sinn Féin), Roy Johnston (Wolfe Tone Society) and Anthony Coughlan (Connolly Association), the Irish republican movement took a decisive leftward ideological turn in the mid sixties. The failed border campaign had proven to the new leadership that small-scale military insurrections did not arouse much support from the masses. Electoral abstention had also done little to advance the republican cause among the movement’s Catholic grass-roots, and even less among Northern Protestants.

Not only did the movement’s tactics come under serious scrutiny by the new leadership, its understanding of the nature of the conflict with Britain also changed. Heavily influenced by Marxist ideology, Goulding, MacGiolla, Johnston and Coughlan believed that the primary cause of both partition and the underdevelopment of Ireland was the capitalist economic system itself. The predatory nature of international capitalism, wrote Roy Johnston, caused larger countries like Britain and the United States

to exploit smaller client states such as Ireland. This ravenous relationship was the primary cause of widespread poverty and social strife in these states, helping to maintain cheap labour and cheap resources for the world's leading industrial superpowers.²⁰²

Northern Ireland, during O'Neill's tenure, became increasingly dependent on British monies and foreign investments. To make matters worse, these funds were being used to finance O'Neill's intensive industrialisation programme that favoured wealthier Protestant areas and neglected the Catholic heartland. The Republic of Ireland also witnessed a whittling away of its own economic sovereignty during the late fifties and early sixties. The Fianna Fáil government under Sean Lemass, and later under Jack Lynch, broke with the party's long-standing tradition of protectionism and adopted an intensive programme of economic diversification and industrialisation. The purpose of the 'Lemass Miracle' was to lift the Republic's economy out of its industrial backwardness to a level of development analogous to the western European average. In the eyes of the new republican leadership, however, this programme substantially reduced the power of local elected officials over Ireland's own resources. Greater integration into British and continental economies also increased the Irish worker's subordination to the unpredictable whims of international trade relations. The republican leadership feared that ending partition, should it occur under the economic status quo, would not benefit the Irish proletariat at all but rather the foreign industrialists who had everything to gain from an Ireland desperate enough to beckon foreign investors with generous subsidies and tax credits. As Goulding told the *Belfast Telegraph* in 1966,

The abolition of the border isn't as simple as the question suggests. The top people, North and South, realise they have vested interests here. If they want to preserve their position, the only hope for them is to integrate [with Britain...].

²⁰² See Roy Johnston: *The Lessons of the Irish Question* (1967), p.1.

When they eventually bring the border to an end it will be part and parcel of the British Empire. The Irish people will be robbed completely of their birthright. The country will be in the hands of foreign capitalists.²⁰³

The generous economic assistance given to foreign companies by the governments of Northern Ireland and of the Republic—companies which often scaled down their operations or closed-up shop when such funds dried up—amounted to a form of “neo-unionism” in the eyes of the republican leaders.²⁰⁴ The sudden increase in British and foreign economic influence over both parts of Ireland was seen as a graver threat than the Northern border because it threatened not only the economic future of the Irish people, but all political gains made since 1916. As Anthony Coughlan wrote in *Tuairisc*, the Wolfe Tone Society newsletter:

The far-seeing leaders of British imperialism say that the bright young men of Fianna Fáil might prove a better bet for preserving British influence in Ireland in the long run than the bigoted fanatics of the North. Hence O’Neill has been given his orders to play down discrimination and brush the corruption under the carpet while Britain snares Lemass into the United Kingdom.²⁰⁵

The negotiation of an Anglo-Irish free trade agreement, as well as plans for both countries to join the European Economic Community (EEC), were recurrent news items in the early and mid-sixties. While influential members of the Catholic middle-class such as Conn McCluskey and John Hume were openly supportive of increased international trade relations, the republican leadership was not. For Goulding and his associates, Anglo-Irish free trade, as well as integration into the European trading bloc, could only spell a greater loss of Irish autonomy as its economic, political, and cultural interests

²⁰³ Cathal Goulding (‘I.R.A.’), interview with John Rooks, “The Mind of the IRA,” *Belfast Telegraph*, 15 February, 1966.

²⁰⁴ Republican Education Department: *Ireland Today and Some Questions on the Way Forward* (1969), p.5; quoted in Henry Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion: Republicanism and Socialism in Modern Ireland* (1989), p.106.

²⁰⁵ *Tuairisc*, 31 August 1966, p.7. The article is not signed. On the authorship of Coughlan, see Henry Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion*, p.88, note 20.

became further subjugated to those of more powerful states. Convinced that free trade and European unity were to drag Ireland back to a new colonial situation, Roy Johnston declared:

The existence of imperialism as a world-spanning system has shattered the basis on which a viable capitalist democracy might have rested. All the people who in earlier epochs would have provided the 'entrepreneurial talent' are now soaked up in the imperial machine, either by emigration to the metropolis (the 'brain drain' process) or as local administrators.²⁰⁶

Goulding, for his part, was convinced that the neo-unionist economic trend, the exploitation of the Irish working class, and the plundering of Irish resources by foreign corporations could not be stopped simply by ending partition. As he declared in his 1967 speech at Bodenstown, the 'neo-imperialist' march towards continental free-trade would only result in the further impoverishment of the Irish people and the disappearance of their national culture:

We cannot plead ignorance of what is before us if we join with the monopolists of Europe in their common market, [...] this association of bankrupt imperialists who threaten us with the final solution to the Irish problem—extinction...²⁰⁷

Goulding and the socialist-minded republican leadership believed Ireland's induction into the EEC was also bound to further relegate it to the economic periphery of Europe. Left unchecked, the 'neo-unionist' Republic was to become, as Tomas MacGiolla was to assert in a 1972 speech, "a society built not on the needs of its working people but on responses to the capitalist's demands."²⁰⁸ For MacGiolla, breaking the bonds of economic dependence with Britain and Europe was a first step on the road to full Irish independence:

²⁰⁶ Johnston: *The Lessons of the Irish Question*, p.3.

²⁰⁷ Goulding: Speech at Bodenstown, June 1967, *United Irishman*, July 1967.

²⁰⁸ Tomas MacGiolla: "Where We Stand: The Republican Position," Speech delivered at the Republican Clubs Conference, Carrickmore, July 1972, p.12.

Anyone who thinks that he can change the whole country by changing the appearance of control without radically changing its nature is fooling himself and trying to fool the working class. [...] We would break the bonds that tie us to Britain as a controlling market and single dominant partner and we will continue to fight [...] the effects of the decision to join the E.E.C.²⁰⁹

MacGiolla, Goulding, and their associates believed that the IRA should put an end to the tradition of small-scale armed insurrections, which relied too often on the blind hope of sparking massive popular support. The IRA should play, instead, a front-line role in the social and political organisation of the Irish working class on both sides of the border. “We have decided, before we do anything in the future,” declared Goulding in 1966, that

we are going to make sure that the people of Ireland, and our appeal is more to the working class people, understand our aims and objectives, and accept them. [...] We want to try to get through to the Protestant working classes. [...] There is no immediate military plan. We have always gone into action in the past regardless of whether we were supported or not. Now we want to have the bulk of the people with us. The demand for revolution should come from the people, not from a number of people sitting in a back room. [...] We intend that the Irish people should control the resources of Ireland and use them for their own benefit.²¹⁰

The republican leadership thought that a popular movement for civil rights, set up by socialist-minded republicans but open to all, could help rally wide scale popular support against “monopoly capitalist penetration from abroad.”²¹¹ It could also help bridge the sectarian boundaries which kept the people of Northern Ireland divided. Civil rights agitation would furthermore expose the Unionists as the agents of foreign capitalists and foster greater working-class support for republicanism. “How can Unionism possibly survive,” asked the *Tuairisc* editor,

²⁰⁹ Ibid. p.12 (Note: this speech was presented after the ratification of the Anglo-Irish free trade agreement and the treaty of Rome which incorporated both the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom into the European common market.)

²¹⁰ Goulding interview with John Rooks, “The Mind of the IRA,” *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 February 1966.

²¹¹ Johnston: *The Lessons of the Irish Question*, p.5.

when Protestant and Catholic are no longer at one another's throats [...]? It is the outcome republicans, nationalists and genuine labour men who live north of the Border should do their utmost to bring about.²¹²

The ultimate goal of a republican-supported civil rights movement was to use official channels, not the force of arms, to foster mass public support to push forward the new republican agenda. "The purely reformist demands of the Civil Rights Movement," said MacGiolla in 1972, "were in themselves revolutionary [...] we knew the civil rights struggle [...] would be the beginning of a revolution."²¹³ Goulding would add in 1973:

Victory for the people on civil rights issues we knew would inspire them to further battles on the social and economic front. It was in this second stage of the struggle that Republicans saw the greatest prospect of uniting Catholic and Protestant workers. We believed that the struggle for civil rights would become a struggle for class rights: that all Irish workers would become dissenters.²¹⁴

Thus did the republican movement become a primary agent, through the initiative of the Wolfe Tone Society, in the creation of a broad coalition for civil rights in the winter of 1966-67. It was hoped that NICRA, once established as a legitimate political agent combining a cross-section of popular forces, would naturally evolve into a broad anti-unionist front and lead to the creation of a similar initiative in the Irish Republic to the south. This "national liberation front,"²¹⁵ it was envisaged, could then spearhead the two-

²¹² *Tuairisc*, 31 August 1966, p.7-8.

²¹³ MacGiolla: "Where We Stand: The Republican Position," Speech delivered at the Republican Clubs Conference, Carrickmore, July 1972, p.2.

²¹⁴ See Cathal Goulding: "EOLAS interviews Cathal Goulding," *EOLAS* #10 (October 1973), reprinted in *RECON*, Vol. III, No.1 (January 1975), p.42-44. This quote should be read in the context of Goulding's "stages" theory of Irish independence—a step-by-step socialist revolution in both Irish states using popular agitation and democratic channels to bring about the creation of a single socialist republic. The programme called for the democratic restructuring of Stormont through a new constitution that guaranteed proportional representation, civil liberties, and a principle of Irish Union. British withdrawal would occur in negotiated stages and end with the reunification of the two Irish states. See *Tuairisc*, 31 August 1966, and Wolfe Tone Society: "Statement of the Wolfe Tone Society on the Northern Crisis," 23 August 1971.

²¹⁵ *Ibid.* p.44

fronted assault against partition and economic exploitation from abroad in a revolution led by “an army of the people [...] in what is their liberation struggle.”²¹⁶

The concept of national liberation was a new one in Irish republicanism. It was, however, a widely disseminated concept among nationalist movements around the globe during the early decades of the Cold War.²¹⁷ Many of these, like Ireland’s new republican leadership, saw American economic imperialism as a major threat. To rally the forces of the Irish nation against “monopoly capitalist penetration from abroad,”²¹⁸ the IRA needed allies. It found its greatest one in the Communist Party of Ireland.

II. NORTHERN IRELAND COMMUNISTS AND GLOBAL CAPITALISM

While the Dublin-based republican leadership was developing its class-based interpretation of the Irish struggle against partition, the Belfast-based Communist Party of Ireland (CPI) had gradually evolved a proto-republican constitutional position in the years that preceded the civil rights agitation of 1968-69. In contrast to its English counterpart which tended to distance itself from nationalistic politics, members of the CPI held an Ireland-first mentality and believed that the Irish people were being exploited simultaneously both as a nation and a class—“a ‘reserve’ of labour power to keep wages down and increase profit.”²¹⁹ Although the CPI was a small force, it was well-entrenched in the Northern Irish labour movement, and as such it would play an important role in the civil rights movement. Betty Sinclair, one of the most influential Northern communists of the time and a leading member of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, remarked:

²¹⁶ Goulding: *The IRA Speaks in the 1970s* (1972), p.10, quoted in Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion*, p.93.

²¹⁷ See section III of this chapter.

²¹⁸ Johnston: *The Lessons of the Irish Question*, p.5.

²¹⁹ Betty Sinclair: *Unemployment* (1972), p.4.

Since the inception of the two States in Ireland there has always been chronic unemployment and emigration, this was deliberate policy on the part of British imperialism...²²⁰

Likewise, leading Communist Party member James Stewart, an avid supporter of the civil rights cause, suggested that partition and sectarianism in Northern Ireland were the product not of ethnic tensions—as it was argued by nationalists such as Austin Currie—but of the exploitation of Irish workers by foreign capitalists:

The tentacles of the Unionist machine [...] divide the people on both a religious and a class basis. Gerrymandering of constituencies is aimed at both Catholic and Protestant workers, making it extremely difficult to elect workers' representatives to Westminster, Stormont or local government. [...] All opposition parties must [...] combine against the Unionist Party on a programme for greater democracy, for religious and civil liberty and for freedom from the stranglehold of the monopolies.²²¹

The border is an 'artificial border created by Imperialist Britain, restricting the development of Ireland and is one of the principal causes of the underdevelopment of Ireland as compared to other European countries.'²²²

Stewart's belief that sectarianism was a deliberate construct of British economic imperialism was similar to the arguments of the republican Roy Johnston.²²³ Johnston had taken part in English and Irish communist parties before forming the Dublin Wolfe Tone Society and being appointed to the post of civilian advisor to the IRA chief-of-staff, Cathal Goulding. According to Johnston, Ulster was, like Israel and Pakistan, "the fruit of the British 'religious theory of nationality' in its most extreme form," partitioned for the benefit not of the majority but of a small colonial elite:

²²⁰ Ibid. p.8

²²¹ James Stewart: "End This Knavery Now," *Unity* (24 October 1964), reprinted in Stewart: *The Struggle in the North*, p.6.

²²² James Stewart, quoting W.H. McCullough (Founder of Communist Party of Ireland and member of Belfast Trades Council), no title, *Unity* (30 January 1965), reprinted in Stewart: *The Struggle in the North*, p.8.

²²³ See Roy Johnston: *Government by Duplicity*, p.11, in which Johnston makes reference to Mao Tse-tung's theory of class struggle as a suitable model for interpreting the Irish context.

Most of the modern European nations have emerged in the form of secular, democratic republics. The English nation is peculiar. It retains all those primitive forms, which have stamped themselves on their Empire and caused untold confusion and suffering. 'Ulster', 'Pakistan' and 'Israel' are the monuments left by the English to their own primitive political thinking. May they soon be replaced by the more civilised republics of Ireland, India, and Palestine, so that the final battle, in which the working people will take social control of the property, may be fought on an objective basis, unclouded by relics of mediaeval mythology.²²⁴

The communist struggle for employment, civil rights, and Irish reunification, like the new republican paradigm, was directed not so much at unionism as at the international capitalist system. As Betty Sinclair noted,

In the capitalist world today there are over 60 million persons without work [...] Unemployment is rampant in Africa, South America, and the Middle and Far East due to neo-colonialist policies of the imperialist nations. [...] There can never be a cure for unemployment while [capitalism] lasts. [...] The United States has been waging war since the 1950s against the people of the Far East and has 500 military bases ringed around the world, including one in Derry.²²⁵

The heavily anti-American and anti-capitalist rhetoric of the communists and republicans²²⁶ conflicted with the ideology of middle-class nationalists who, choosing instead the rhetoric of racial discrimination, portrayed themselves as 'white Catholic negroes' not as a proletariat of mixed confessions squeezed dry by the capitalist vise. Their Marxist convictions were also at odds with traditionally-minded republicans, such as Seán MacStiopháin and Gerry Adams, who were soon to abandon the official republican movement, spurn its Marxist theories, and form the more militant 'Provisional IRA'.²²⁷

²²⁴ Ibid. p.11

²²⁵ Sinclair: *Unemployment*, p.18.

²²⁶ Henceforth, the combination of Northern communists with Marxist republicans will be referred to as 'red republicans'.

²²⁷ MacStiopháin writes of Goulding's 'stages' theory: "if this went on much longer the IRA would end up as a paper army, both demilitarised and demoralised." Seán MacStiopháin: *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (1975), p.104. See also "Where Sinn Fein Stands" (Policy leaflet of the Provisional Sinn Fein/IRA), not

The communists who participated in NICRA, much like the republican troika of Goulding, Johnston, and MacGiolla, were outspoken critics of the European Economic Community (EEC). Betty Sinclair proposed, for instance, that the inclusion of Ireland, north or south, into the European trade bloc could only exacerbate its precarious economic position. The “capital-intensive” international economy, she argued, favoured a few wealthy states while it impoverished those on the periphery. Such would be the fate of Ireland should it become a member of the EEC:

Workers from Spain, Portugal, Turkey, North Africa, etc. join in with their Italian brothers and sisters [in seeking work abroad] in a lifetime of emigration and deprivation. Is this the future that the Irish workers want? [...] The great need today is to mobilise the entire working class through the trade union and labour movement to win the right to work. This can be done by militant action, North and South, to prevent the ever-recurring redundancies and/or closures of factories.²²⁸

No communist had as strong an influence on the civil rights movement as Betty Sinclair. She had been a member of the CPI since 1932, had participated in the 1932 general strikes, had lived eighteen months in the Soviet Union, had stood as a candidate in the 1945 Stormont elections, and had become secretary of the Belfast Trades Union Council in 1947—a position she occupied for two decades until she became chairman of the NICRA executive. Her brief stay in the Soviet Union had led her to believe that Northern Ireland’s longstanding problems of unemployment and sectarianism were irremediably tied to international capitalism. Her 1933-34 sojourn to the USSR, she told the *Irish Times*,

was a terrific experience, like [discovering] a new world. You did your work, and did not have to look over your shoulder for the boss, nor worry about unemployment or anything like that. [...] There was a great spirit of comradeship.

dated, NICRA archive (Ann Hope papers), Linen Hall Library, Belfast; and Gerry Adams: “A Republican in the Civil Rights Campaign,” In Michael Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On* (1988), p.47.

²²⁸ Sinclair: *Unemployment*, p.10-11, 13.

At home at the time, of course, the unemployment was terrible. I had been out of work, so was my father and my elder brother. [...] For the ordinary working person to be without work is the greatest indignity.²²⁹

After her return from the Soviet Union, Sinclair longed for the cross-sectarian camaraderie which she had experienced in the Belfast general strikes of the early thirties—but which had unfortunately come apart and been replaced by sectarian “pogroms” during her absence.²³⁰ Sinclair had been, since 1949, an avid proponent of a labour and civil liberties campaign in the ideological tradition of James Connolly.²³¹ She would have to wait nearly two decades before cross-communal collaboration was again possible.

Hence for Northern communists in the civil rights movement, as demonstrated by the writings of Betty Sinclair and James Stewart, the fight against capitalist exploitation and the Irish national struggle against partition were two facets of the same coin. The emancipation of the Irish nation-class, they believed, required an overhaul of the capitalist system at home, and this could only be achieved through a clean break, politically and economically, between Ireland and Britain. This belief drew Northern communists—a large number of whom were women and/or belonged to the Protestant community—closer to the new republican leadership in vision and resolve. The

²²⁹ Betty Sinclair, interview with Dennis Kennedy, *Irish Times*, 29 October 1968.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*

²³¹ Connolly was a republican socialist revolutionary executed for his role in the 1916 Easter Rising. “Connolly might be seen to stand forth as the lineal ancestor of Franz Fanon,” suggest Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom, “testifying to socialism as a faith for the victims of imperialism, and not solely or even primarily as that of the proletariat of highly advanced capitalist societies.” *James Connolly: Selected Political Writings*, edited by Owen Dudley Edwards and Bernard Ransom (1973), p.34. “James Connolly,” wrote Betty Sinclair, “knew that unemployment and emigration were ingrained features of British Rule in Ireland and advocated the establishment of an independent democratic—and socialist—republic.” Sinclair: *Unemployment*, p.1. The utopian concept of ‘Connolly’s Republic’ was a recurrent theme in the words and writings of pro-civil rights socialists. For examples, see Gerry Fitt’s comments in *Irish Times*, 2 April 1969; Cathal Goulding’s interview in *New Left Review* no.64, November/December 1970; Tomas MacGiolla’s 1972 speech at Carrickmore “Where We Stand: The Republican Position,” Michael Farrell’s *Struggle in the North*, 1972, p.33; and Eamonn McCann’s *War and an Irish Town*, 1974, p.150.

collaboration of predominantly Catholic republicans²³² with Protestant communists to form the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) was, in and of itself, a revolutionary event in Northern Ireland politics.

The communists and republicans of NICRA made a concerted effort to include a broad assortment of moderates—nationalist and unionist alike—within the NICRA fold. In this they were only partly successful. No Unionist wanted to collaborate with individuals they considered to be enemies of the state, no matter how moderate they showed themselves to be. Some nationalists such as Conn McCluskey accepted to join, while others such as John Hume—the most able *rassembleur* within the civil rights camp—wanted no part of it. Nonetheless, while red republicans played a central role in establishing and running NICRA, they proved remarkably moderate in their tactics given the inherently subversive nature of their ideology. The red republicans who founded NICRA and participated in its activities believed in a gradual and non-violent transition to socialism, not a revolution, so as to rally behind them the widest possible popular consensus. “We are quite prepared to use constitutional methods,” said Goulding:

What we want to attract are genuine republicans, Irish revolutionaries who want to establish an independent republic, and we don't want to have a bunch of gangsters in the movement.²³³

Most republican members of the Civil Rights Association, wrote Fred Heatley, the former NICRA treasurer and Wolfe Tone Society founding member,

would, I think, be classed now as ‘moderate’ in that they did not believe in force to obtain their aims. [...] In its best years, 1968 and early 1969, not even William Craig could make a sincere accusation of IRA or Sinn Féin control.²³⁴

²³² A notable exception was the republican Marxist Roy Johnston—a Dublin Protestant. Johnston was, not surprisingly, a major architect of the republican-communist *rapprochement*.

²³³ Goulding: interview with John Rooks, “The Mind of the IRA,” *Belfast Telegraph*, 17 February 1966.

²³⁴ Fred Heatley: “Under the Influence?” *Fortnight*, 7 June 1974, p.14.

NICRA chairperson Betty Sinclair, whose communism had “never been held against her work on behalf of the underprivileged,”²³⁵ had herself cautioned fellow activists frequently against provoking the police and loyalists. “We will be more effective in showing to the world that we are a peaceful people,” she told the masses assembled in Dungannon on 24 August 1968, “asking for our civil rights in an orderly manner.”²³⁶ “Some of us as individuals may have been socialists,” wrote also Heatley, “but we knew that our strength was in forging a unity of purpose with clearly defined targets rather than on chasing a doctrinaire political belief.”²³⁷

Ultimately, this “unity of purpose” which red republicans in the civil rights movement hoped to forge would have to win the favour of middle-class nationalists, Protestant labourers, and a number of other elements not traditionally favourable to the republican programme, for their “clearly defined target”²³⁸ was that civil rights agitation should lead, as it had in Vietnam and many parts of Latin America, to the formation of a national liberation front.

III. THE NATIONAL LIBERATION PARADIGM

In their quest to forge a broad civil rights coalition, red republicans such as Goulding and Sinclair were not seeking to destroy the Northern statelet but to divide the Unionists and their traditional working-class supporters—and thus to transform the province’s political system from within. The willingness of the red republicans to enter the arena of constitutional politics made relations easier between them and constitutional nationalists such as Gerry Fitt, Conn McCluskey and Austin Currie, who also believed in ending

²³⁵ *Ibid.* p.14

²³⁶ *Irish News*, 26 August 1968.

²³⁷ Heatley: “The NICRA Split,” *Fortnight*, 10 May 1974, p.13.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*

partition through political, not military means. But while both groups saw the end of partition as a long-term goal, they had divergent visions of the future Ireland-to-be. Goulding's Irish Republic was to be an industrial, worker-centered, secular and socialist state, while Currie's future Ireland was to be much like the existing Irish Republic to the south, only slightly more pluralistic and social-democratic in nature.

The red republicans were avid supporters of non-violent civil rights agitation because they believed it was the surest way to topple sectarianism in Northern Ireland and to recast the electoral spectrum along an economic axis (i.e.: labour versus capital) rather than a sectarian one (i.e.: Catholic versus Protestant). The "crucial significance of the Civil Rights demands," wrote Roy Johnston, was to "allow the working population to mix as neighbours and as fellow-trade-unionists [so that] a class consciousness will develop."²³⁹ Consequently, a coalition of pro-labour forces including republicans, nationalists, communists, intellectuals and merchants could finally emerge to form an anti-sectarian, anti-partitionist, and anti-imperialist popular front. Civil rights reforms, therefore, did not represent an end in themselves to the red republicans, but a first stage in the long march towards socialism and full sovereignty:

Our idea is the achievement of an all-Ireland republic, politically and economically in control of its own destiny, the home of a nation of free and educated citizens, in which the exploitation of man by man has been abolished.²⁴⁰

Goulding and his associates believed that a broad coalition of left-wing activists, legitimated by a non-violent constitutional agenda, was better suited to bring about Irish unity than anything the militaristic IRA could do on its own. "When the Republican Movement evolved its revolutionary strategy in the middle sixties," said MacGiolla,

²³⁹ Johnston: *Government by Duplicity*, p.11.

²⁴⁰ *Tuairisc*, 31 August 1966, p.1.

it was clearly based on a people's struggle for the ownership of the wealth of their country and for full control of their lives and destinies. We said then and have repeatedly emphasized since, that no elitist group could emancipate the Irish people [through] a united working class struggle...²⁴¹

In 1964, the IRA special army convention agreed to initiate the creation of a “national liberation front” of republicans, small farmers, trade unions and intellectuals banded together to cause “a political crisis for imperialism.”²⁴² Communist activist James Stewart had also, as early as 1963, called for a “progressive alliance based on the working class, small farmers, small business men and intellectuals [for] the establishment of a Progressive Government at Stormont.”²⁴³ As Goulding later testified:

The ordinary people are steadily moving leftward. *This is not something that is peculiar to Ireland. It has been happening all over the world.* Ordinary people are beginning to realize that they have a right to the use and enjoyment of the resources of their country, no matter what country.²⁴⁴

Statements such as these are profoundly marked by the ideology of national liberation, a form of left-wing nationalism that transcended Irish borders during the sixties.

The nationalist rhetoric promulgated during this period by the Indian National Congress, the African National Congress, Ho Chi Minh, Fidel Castro, Patrice Lumumba and Salvador Allende—to name but a few—was steeped in values similar to those of the Irish red republicans. These values, “a blend of Marxist universalism, of nationalist

²⁴¹ MacGiolla: *Where We Stand: The Republican Position*. Speech delivered at the Republican Press Conference (July 1972).

²⁴² Sinn Fein: *The Lessons of History* (1967), quoted in Patterson: *The Politics of Illusion*, p.94. See also *Ireland Today and Some Questions on the Way Forward* (1969).

²⁴³ James Stewart: “The Fight for Greater Democratic Rights Must be Waged,” *Unity* (30 March 1963), in Stewart: *The Struggle in the North*, p.3.

²⁴⁴ Emphasis added. Goulding: “The New Strategy of the IRA,” *New Left Review*, No.64 (November-December 1970), p.60.

particularism [...] and of the liberal conception of self-determination,²⁴⁵ gave rise to the short-lived but widely disseminated concept of ‘national liberation’.²⁴⁶

The national liberation paradigm was, according to international relations author and researcher Neil MacFarlane, a new and original hybrid ideology that took root in the Cold War context of the mid-twentieth century. This was a period during which numerous colonies in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean gained their political independence but remained severely dependent upon, and exploited by, foreign markets and international corporations. This ideology also had strong appeal, explains sociologist Ernest Gellner, among populations where ethnic or cultural criteria continued to “inhibit the free-flow of personnel across the loose lines of social stratification.”²⁴⁷ To wit, even the developed West was affected, as not only Irish republicans; numerous African-American and French Canadian nationalists also drew their inspiration from the national liberation doctrine.²⁴⁸ Northern Ireland, with its experience of British colonialism and sectarian discrimination, was a natural breeding ground for this worldview. The national liberation ideology combined eighteenth-century ideals of liberalism proper to the republican mindset since the days of Wolfe Tone, with twentieth century concepts of individual rights and

²⁴⁵ Neil S. MacFarlane: *Superpower Rivalry & 3rd World Radicalism* (1985), p.6.

²⁴⁶ While the writings of red republicans that I have collected do not discuss at length national liberation movements in other countries, they demonstrate a similar understanding of the concept: see for instance Roy Johnston’s *Government by Duplicity* and the collection of James Stewart’s articles, *The Struggle In The North*. Red republicans, however, draw numerous parallels between Unionists in Ireland and right-wing regimes around the world, such as Franco’s Spain, Salazar’s Portugal, the United States under the influence of Senator McCarthy, the right-wing coup in Greece against Papandreou, and, later, the CIA sponsored and Pinochet-led coup against Allende in Chile. (See Stewart: *The Struggle in the North*, p.8, 10-11; Goulding: “The New Strategy of the IRA” in *New Left Review*, No. 64, p.53, and “EOLAS interviews Cathal Goulding,” in *RECON*, volume III, No.1, p.36; and Sinclair: *Unemployment*, p.18.)

²⁴⁷ Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism* (1983), p.96.

²⁴⁸ See for instance works by Charles E., Jones, ed.: *The Black Panther Party [Reconsidered]* (1998); George Breitman: “The National Question and the Black Liberation Struggle in The United States,” in George Breitman and George Novack: *Black Nationalism and Socialism* (1971); and Pierre Vallières: *White Niggers of America* (1972.)

collective self-determination. To this were added Marxist notions of class struggle, secular egalitarianism, and collective ownership of national resources, popularized in Ireland by the writings of the republican revolutionary James Connolly.

The national liberation paradigm set the new republican mindset apart from the traditional republicanism of the past and that of the future Provisional IRA. It strengthened the conviction of red republicans that the Irish, North and South, were the victims of foreign—and not strictly British—exploitation, and this not as a nation but *as a class*. For the red republicans backing the civil rights campaign, their goal was clearly more than just ending discrimination; it was the creation of a massive and potentially revolutionary movement, a coalition of communities banded together in the name of national sovereignty against the imperialist impulses of the international capitalist system.

The battle against right-wing repression abroad gave the red republicans a greater appreciation of the international aspects of the Irish problem and the need to rally a broad anti-imperialist consensus. As Goulding told the *New Left Review* in 1970,

We believed that political power must be our objective, whether we got it through physical force or through the ballot box or by agitation. [...] The people can't get real political power by simply having representatives elected. There were too many examples in the world—Greece, Spain, Portugal, where the people elected 'the Government' in a democratic manner and were 'democratically' oppressed by the forces of the Establishment who 'democratically' control the police, the Army, and the Church. [...] The people who needed our services were the working classes, the small farmers, the dispossessed people, the exploited people [...] These were the only people who were being exploited by imperialism, politically, economically, and culturally.²⁴⁹

National liberation struggles in Vietnam, Cuba, the Congo, Hungary and Yemen had drawn significant media coverage before and during Northern Ireland's civil rights

²⁴⁹ Cathal Goulding: "The New Strategy of the IRA," in *New Left Review*, No. 64 (November-December 1970), p.53, 56.

campaign, and they all had drawn superpower intervention in some form or other; large-scale tragedy usually ensued. It was therefore imperative that the republican leadership, if it wished to see its goal reach a favourable end, exercise caution and restraint in pushing forward such a programme.

IV. THE FAILURE OF RED REPUBLICANISM

The national liberation paradigm was an imported concept that did not sit well with traditionally-minded republicans who were suspicious of most things Marxist, and who were impatient to resume the armed struggle against partition. The new ideology of the red republicans ultimately failed to rally sufficient popular support to bring about either a democratic regime change or a socialist revolution in Northern Ireland. They hoped to see the civil rights movement turn into a progressive socialist alliance that would topple the ruling Unionist party and bring about an end to “monopoly capitalist penetration from abroad.”²⁵⁰ Their ultimate goal—the end of both partition and free-market capitalism throughout the island—ended in abject failure.

In this light, the fragmentation of the civil rights movement turned the red republicans into greater losers than the constitutional nationalists. While the coming of the Troubles was for the nationalists an important setback, it did not cause the demise of their constitutional programme; the formation of the SDLP allowed constitutional nationalists to pursue their aims through political institutions in Stormont, London and, eventually, the European parliament in Strasbourg. The red republicans, however, had no similar option. While Goulding, Sinclair, and their colleagues sought a greater political presence at Stormont for leftist parties—including, at the time, Sinn Féin—these parties did not

²⁵⁰ Johnston: *The Lessons of the Irish Question*, p.5.

have sufficient popular support to win many—if any—seats. They were also the subject of Unionist-imposed bans, which prevented them from organising under official party banners. More importantly, the republican leadership never managed to convince its own grassroots to adopt the red republican philosophy or to abandon the age-old tradition of parliamentary abstention.

The loyalist backlash that neutralized the civil rights movement in 1969 did much to inflame long-standing sectarian hostilities, as well as loyalist fears that the civil rights movement was a disguised IRA campaign. Ironically, NICRA had allowed the republican movement to inch its way closer to the sphere of democratic constitutional politics, not armed insurrection. But the major roadblock which Goulding, Sinclair, and their acolytes had to face, and which ultimately sealed the fate of their programme, came from within the republican camp itself.

Goulding never managed to assert his full authority over the republican grassroots. His socialist theories were seen, even by important members of the IRA council, as a “proposal to divert the IRA into the never-never land of theoretical Marxism and parliamentary politics.”²⁵¹ Seán MacStiofáin, who was to lead the haemorrhage of Northern republicans out of the official movement to form the Provisional IRA, called Goulding and his closest aides “anti-revolutionaries obsessed with parliamentary politics and Marxist debates.”²⁵² Nearly two thirds of the 1966 republican convention had voted against Goulding’s proposal to end the political abstention of Sinn Féin. Goulding also had to veto a number of calls by MacStiofáin for bombing campaigns against foreign companies that performed mass layoffs or took advantage of government subsidies.

²⁵¹ Seán MacStiofáin: *Memoirs of a Revolutionary* (1975), p.99.

²⁵² *Ibid.* p.110

Goulding often outmanoeuvred such militants but faced increasing opposition from those in the grass-roots who upheld “militant Republican Separatism”,²⁵³ particularly Belfast radicals such as Gerry Adams. “While the leadership plotted its gradualist approach,” wrote Adams, “we felt, rightly or wrongly that we were more in touch with reality.”²⁵⁴

Facing profound divisions within the republican movement, Goulding, Johnston and MacGiolla nonetheless strove to lead the IRA onto the path of parliamentary politics. The pressures to retain the support of the militant grassroots were great, as Goulding observed:

We had on our hands trained physical force revolutionaries who were, to some extent, still armed. They would decide themselves what would happen next, if we didn't decide for them. [...] It was essential to stop any premature action by these people.²⁵⁵

This explains to a great extent the contradictory nature of Goulding's and MacGiolla's public statements during the late sixties. Publicly, MacGiolla did not discount resorting to arms to protect civil rights protestors from loyalist violence, while Goulding, when asked about the presence of IRA men in the civil rights movement, said, “We have no plans for a military campaign but we still believe that in the final analysis the decisions will be made by physical force.”²⁵⁶ Though statements such as these were designed in part to reassure the republican grassroots that the IRA and Sinn Féin leadership had not gone soft, they had the ill effect of inflaming the anti-civil rights rhetoric of prominent loyalists. This instilled greater fear among the Protestant/unionist population that the IRA and its new communist allies were fomenting a bloody revolution. It also provided

²⁵³ Ibid. p.110

²⁵⁴ Gerry Adams: “A Republican in the Civil Rights Campaign,” In Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On*, p.47.

²⁵⁵ Goulding “The New Strategy of the IRA,” *New Left Review*, No. 64 (November/ December 1970), p.51-52.

²⁵⁶ *Belfast Telegraph*, 9 December 1968; *Belfast Telegraph*, 10 February 1969.

the added justification for loyalist thugs and paramilitaries to set off violent reprisals against republicans and civil rights marchers during the winter and spring of 1969. In the end, rather than carving for itself a comfortable niche between republican radicals and moderate reformers from which to lead the struggle for national liberation, the republican leadership ended up alienating itself from both.

As for the influence of communists in the civil rights campaign, it began to dwindle in March 1969, as soon as Betty Sinclair was forced out of the NICRA leadership to make way for the young radicals of the People's Democracy, with whom she often clashed. When three other moderates—John MacAnerney, Fred Heatley and Raymond Shearer—followed Sinclair out the door,²⁵⁷ the NICRA was left in the hands of a more radical executive comprising an influential contingent of PD members, agents of the growing international trend of New Left radicalism.

As we shall see in the following chapter, prominent PD leaders such as Michael Farrell, Bernadette Devlin, and Eamonn McCann did espouse a Marxist worldview not unlike that of the red republicans. However, their rebellious exuberance and disdain for the socialist old guard, coupled with their radically different assessment of Ireland's position in the wider world, would significantly erode the narrow consensus that the red republicans had, for nearly a decade, fought so hard to build.

The red republicans looked with dismay upon the growth of what they considered to be a capitalist new world order taking shape—an embryonic version of our present global economy—manifested in the growing power of multinational corporations and free trade blocs, and in the impoverishment of peripheral regions such as Ireland. “There can never

²⁵⁷ Heatley: “The NICRA Split,” *Fortnight*, 10 May 1974, p.13.

be a cure for unemployment while that system lasts,” wrote Betty Sinclair, “The order of the day is capital-intensive industries, not labour-intensive.”²⁵⁸ The red republicans did sympathise with the racially discriminated blacks of America and Africa, but to no great extent. What they did fear was that the Irish Republic would lose the political and economic independence it had fought so hard to obtain, and that the people of Northern Ireland would remain divided and impoverished for the profit of foreign industrialists. In trying to harness public discontent over civil rights, and thus to bring about the creation of a national liberation front, red republicans hoped to initiate a smoother transition to socialism and full Irish independence than they could have achieved through the barrel of a gun.

If they did not overtly compare their struggle to that of other exploited nations, red republicans were nonetheless greatly concerned by the international context of their time. This being said, they were not excessively interested in the successes and failures of Vietnamese, Algerian, Yemeni, or other contemporaneous liberation movements, but rather by international economic trends: Anglo-Irish free trade, European economic union, American neo-colonialism, and international corporate expansion. It must also be understood that doing so was, to a certain extent, a dangerous enterprise. The Cold War climate that reigned across the West, even in Northern Ireland, was not conducive for them to openly express support for Maoist China, Castro’s Cuba or the Soviet Union, not if they hoped to rally a large number of non-Marxists to their cause. Recent events in Prague, for instance, could only lead to an indictment of Marxism as an anti-democratic force. Red republicans were therefore more likely to express their opposition to right-wing forces (the United States, Spain, Portugal, etc.) than to speak too loudly of militant

²⁵⁸ Sinclair: *Unemployment*, p.18.

revolutionary forces overseas—which was precisely the self-image they did not wish to portray. As Irish Marxists, they could also make ‘safer’ and more popular references to the heritage of James Connolly than to Karl Marx, Mao Tse-Tung or even Frantz Fanon.

In any event, the caution exercised by Goulding and his entourage only led to a schism that bitterly divided the republican movement. The Provisional IRA, which came to dominate republican politics in the North during the next three decades, had little interest in civil rights protests. These were, in their view, pathetic and futile attempts to dislodge an imperialist superpower with mere slogans and songs. Like most moderate nationalists who jettisoned the movement in the spring of 1969, the number of pro-civil rights republicans also quickly dwindled in the wake of the urban violence that racked Derry and Belfast in August 1969. The red republicans, who had nearly abandoned their revolutionary traditions in their attempts to build a mass movement, now found themselves, ironically, being accused of cowardice by the same people who would not support the border campaign a decade earlier. Amidst popular chants of “IRA—I Ran Away,” the red republicans looked on helplessly as armed ‘Provos’ took the lead in facing off against police, soldiers and armed loyalists in the months and years that followed, thus digging deeper the sectarian trench which the red republicans had tried so hard to overcome.

CHAPTER 5
THE PLOUGH:
THE IRISH NEW LEFT AND THE GLOBAL REVOLUTION

*It was an extraordinary year. Near revolution in France. Dancing in the streets of Prague in the spring, tanks in the summer. The Tet offensive in Vietnam, Lyndon Johnson forced from office and the battle of Chicago. Student protest all over the place. That October it caught up with Belfast. [...] It was all very naïve, especially around Queen's. We didn't know what we were up against or realise what forces we were playing with.*²⁵⁹

*1968 was a strategic year in recent revolutionary history. The Viet Cong through their Tet offensive showed that U.S. imperialism, despite its military might, was not invulnerable. In France, workers and students united in a general strike [...] And in 1968 the world began to hear of Derry.*²⁶⁰

*This was our Paris, our Prague, our Chicago.*²⁶¹

Alongside the many constitutional nationalists and red republicans who made up the core leadership of Northern Ireland's civil rights organisations,²⁶² a third and more radical ideological stream, the New Left, rose to prominence in the months that followed the 5 October 1968 march in Derry. This third wave of civil rights protestors was distinguished by its claims of being neutral on the question of partition, by its revolutionary fervour, and by its antipathy towards the leaders of the Catholic middle-class and republican and communist 'old left'. This third grouping would come to play an important role in mobilising the masses for civil rights, particularly in Belfast, but its militancy and youthful impatience, coupled with its impulsive desire to imitate, almost blindly, a number of student revolts occurring elsewhere in the world, would lead to bitter acrimony between it and other civil rights factions. Ultimately, as flamboyant and

²⁵⁹ Steve McBride, biographical insert in "Civil Rights: A New Look," *Fortnight*, October 1988, p.9.

²⁶⁰ Eamonn McCann: "1968: An Activist Recalls," in "Derry 10 Years Later," *Worker's Research Unit Bulletin*, No. 4, 1978.

²⁶¹ Michael Farrell: "Long March to Freedom," in Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On* (1988), p.55.

²⁶² These were the Campaign for Social Justice, the Wolfe Tone Society, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association, and the Derry Citizens' Action Committee.

inspiring as these militant socialists would prove to be, they were also largely responsible for exacerbating the spiral of sectarian violence that would give birth to the Troubles.

I. THE NEW LEFT AT HOME AND ABROAD

The socialist radicals who would become the heart of the People's Democracy (PD) movement in the winter of 1968-69 saw themselves as an integral part of the worldwide community of non-aligned revolutionary socialists better known as the 'New Left'. The New Left, an international protest movement that peaked in the late sixties, was described thus by historian Ronald Fraser:

From Prague to Paris, London and Tokyo, San Francisco to Peking, student revolts erupted with unforeseeable suddenness in the 1960s to challenge the existing order of society [...] threatening capitalist and socialist established orders alike. [...] Indeed, it is in opposition to the previous decade's cultural and political Cold War stasis that much of what happened in the following decade must be seen.²⁶³

The New Left movement was not a coordinated campaign; it varied in purpose and tactics from one country to the next. It was, in a sense, not so much an ideology but a reaction, a revolt against the imperialistic practices of Western states, as well as the repressive nature of Stalinism in Eastern Europe. The American occupation of Vietnam was especially outrageous to New Left activists in all parts of the globe. But while these 'New Leftists' were quick to speak out against nuclear war and imperialism, their solutions to these problems were often discordant and simplistic. "What was unique about 1968," writes Mark Kurlansky,

was that people were rebelling over disparate issues and had in common only that desire to rebel, ideas about how to do it, a sense of alienation from the established order, and a profound distaste for authoritarianism of any form. [...] It was not planned and it was not organised. Rebellions were directed through hastily called meetings; some of the most important decisions were made on a moment's whim.

²⁶³ Ronald Fraser: *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt* (1988), p.1.

The movements were anti-authoritarian and so were leaderless or had leaders who denied being leaders. Ideologies were seldom clear, and there was widespread agreement on very few issues.²⁶⁴

Broken down to a simplistic formula, the New Left paradigm can best be described as revolutionary socialist democracy.

The New Left drew its name from its opposition to long-established Marxists—Italian trade unions, French communists, British Labourmen, Northern Ireland red republicans, etc.—as well as the Democratic Party in the United States. These members of the ‘Old Left’ were repudiated by the new generation as gentrified revolutionaries, institutionalized bureaucrats too comfortably attached to their place in the capitalist system. As Fraser notes:

The Cold War, at home and abroad, welfare statism and growing material prosperity had contributed to locking these movements into the established consensus. [...] In the East, the practice of Stalinism offered no viable alternative model to the majority of the labour movements in the West. [...] The burden of a radically different vision of society thus fell, by default one might say, on the shoulders of students—a transient sector of society, not a class despite their own largely middle-class origins—with little or no apparent means to effect radical change. [...] In almost all cases, they looked for inspiration to Third World liberation movements which, in challenging the orthodoxies of both East and West, appeared to be opening up a new political space.²⁶⁵

The New Left philosophy was an eclectic mixture of contestation doctrines, from radical student politics to pacifism, greatly affected by American counterculture and support for various civil rights and national liberation movements. The New Left ideology was nonetheless permeated by the idealistic belief that a humanitarian form of socialism could solve any and all of the world’s ills. In a world teetering on the brink of nuclear war, divided between two antagonistic economic systems whose belligerence knew no bounds, it was perhaps inevitable that a generation of educated youths, steeped in the rhetoric of

²⁶⁴ Mark Kurlansky: *1968: The Year that Rocked the World* (2004), p.xvii-xviii.

²⁶⁵ Fraser: *1968: A Student Generation in Revolt*, p.3.

democracy and human rights, would lash out against the elites of a world they saw spinning out of control—a world which they were reluctantly poised to inherit.

New Leftists were enthusiastic defenders of democracy and social justice, inspired by third world revolutions and enraged by the “failings of their own societies.”²⁶⁶ This combination of global and regional grievances made each New Left revolt a distinct phenomenon. In all cases, however, the media and publications such as the *New Left Review* offered New Leftists the chance to observe foreign events and to emulate their fellow students in what they believed was a concerted operation. Thus in Berkeley, Prague and Belfast, the New Left paradigm did not require much impetus to spread like wildfire: early revolts in Rome, Paris and Mexico had offered the model which was mimicked elsewhere, and the masses were easily mobilized in the name of civil liberties. By the fall of 1968, it did not require much thought to join local manifestations of the New Left, it was in many ways just a question of jumping on the bandwagon.

Television coverage also helped mobilized the New Left throughout the Western world with brief and sensational footage of foreign ‘brethren’ rebelling against ‘The System.’ These spontaneous acts of defiance were easily imitated. This was especially the case in Northern Ireland, as Ciaran McKeown remarked:

like children imitating each other in the school yard [...] the copycat effect was also accelerated by the simple fact that domestic perceptions everywhere on issues of justice and liberation in a supposedly post-imperial age, were bound to be similar.²⁶⁷

Thanks to the media, foreign events took on an added significance in the eyes of Northern Ireland’s young civil rights supporters. In the days that preceded the Coalisland-to-Dungannon civil rights march of 24 August 1968, for example, state-sponsored

²⁶⁶ Ibid. p.5

²⁶⁷ Ciaran McKeown: *The Passion of Peace* (1984), p. 11-12.

repression in both Czechoslovakia and Biafra were given prominent attention by the *Irish News*, which gave broad coverage to these events alongside details of the upcoming march.²⁶⁸ Again, in the days following the violent 5 October 1968 march in Derry, which subsequently brought about the formation of the People's Democracy in Belfast, the *Times* reports of the clash in Derry was printed alongside similar events transpiring in Czechoslovakia and Mexico, as well as civil war in Nigeria, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, news of an upcoming anti-Vietnam protest in London, the American bombing of Vietnam, and an editorial comparing Bill Craig, the Northern Ireland Minister of Home Affairs, to Richard Daley, the imperious Mayor of Chicago. The abuses of the RUC in Derry were also compared to those perpetrated by Chicago police a month earlier, and another editorial questioned Prime Minister Wilson's attempts to broker peace treaties in Africa and Vietnam while he virtually ignored the Irish problem.²⁶⁹ All of these stories appeared side by side in a single edition of the *Times*, a pattern repeated in several other well-read publications. Thus, for the politicized students who took to the streets of Dungannon, Belfast, Derry and Armagh in the fall of 1968, one did not need to look any further than the daily newspapers to perceive links between discrimination at home and tyrannical regimes abroad.

The Northern Ireland New Left emerged *en force* in the fall and winter of 1968-69. In the wake of the 5 October 1968 civil rights march in Derry, a combination of young militants from three different associations came together to form a single front. These were the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) led by Michael Farrell and Cyril Toman; former members of the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC), namely Eamonn

²⁶⁸ See *Irish News*, 18-24 August 1968.

²⁶⁹ *The Times*, 7 and 8 October 1968.

McCann; and the new People's Democracy movement comprising, among others, the charismatic and volatile Bernadette Devlin and the junior law lecturer Kevin Boyle.

The PD was born out of the cauldron of civil rights protest, much like—and partly inspired by—the American Black Power movement. From the youth revolts of Chicago and Paris, it borrowed its unshakeable resolve to bring about a complete overhaul of the 'Tory' capitalist system in Northern Ireland. From Vietnam, Czechoslovakia, and Cuba, it understood that tyranny at home, as elsewhere, would not be overturned without the blood of martyrs being spilt. The PD was soon to become the flagship of the Northern Ireland New Left, and its influences were undeniably global in origin. "From Alabama to Paris and Prague to Londonderry," noted a 1969 *Belfast Telegraph* editorial, "young people have looked at the political structure they will inherit, and found it wanting in democracy and humanity."²⁷⁰

Between the birth of the PD on 9 October 1968 and the premeditated assault of loyalists against its members on 4 January 1969, the PD grew exponentially, losing simultaneously its most moderate founding members, such as the constitutionalist Ciaran McKeown.²⁷¹ With its exuberant youthful spirit and confrontational direct-action tactics borrowed from American and French student activists, the PD became a significant addition to the civil rights campaign. However, its growing resolve to stare down the reigning Unionist Party at all costs caused a huge rift between itself and other civil rights organisations. The PD's lack of central leadership, its reckless zeal for change, and its mistrust of both the 'Old Left' (i.e.: red republicans) and 'Green Tories' (i.e.: constitutional and traditional nationalists) accelerated the disintegration of the civil rights movement.

²⁷⁰ Barry White: "Why Men March," *Belfast Telegraph*, 16 January 1969.

²⁷¹ On McKeown, see chapter 3.

II. RADICAL STUDENT POLITICS BEFORE THE ATTACK AT BURNTOLLET BRIDGE

Prior to October 1968, the Queen's University, Belfast (QUB) campus was remarkably "docile"²⁷² compared to those of Rome, Paris and San Francisco. Student politics here were also far less radical than they were elsewhere in the U.K. Queen's was a relatively well integrated part of Northern Ireland where sectarian politics had a lesser impact than they did in most other parts of the highly segregated province. Nonetheless, while the Queen's Student Union was mostly composed of Protestants, debating clubs such as the New Ireland Society²⁷³ had a predominantly Catholic membership. This situation led young educated Catholics to spend more time and energy than their Protestant counterparts comparing the local political scene with repressive regimes overseas. As a number of Catholic students became increasingly interested in American and African affairs, so did their belief that sectarianism, as practiced by both the Unionists and the Nationalists, impoverished the masses and prevented genuine democracy from taking root in the province.

Fed by the international spirit of student revolt, debating and activism began to grow in intensity and popularity at Queen's as early as 1963. "This was the beginning of the era of the 'student revolution'," wrote Ciaran McKeown, who served as president of the New Ireland Society and on the QUB student council:

The rhetoric of that period was already audible in Queen's University debating societies; and some of the themes that would be articulated in the Civil Rights Movement in the latter Sixties had begun to be aired. [...] Students in one place saw students in another engaging in public demonstration and riot, in venues as far as Tokyo, Berlin, Paris, and the United States [...] As the Americans gradually became more murderous in Vietnam, for instance, there was a feeling that the

²⁷² Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.14.

²⁷³ The New Ireland society was a political club that welcomed a number of internationally-minded speakers, such as the Irish historian Connor Cruise O'Brien and English Marxist Tariq Ali, and which promoted secular nationalism and cross-communal dialogue.

Nazis had been beaten, but that Nazism had won. There was also, I think, an element of unconscious revolt against the investment in students to make them useful units in a technological society. [...] But in Belfast, in late 1963, while tuned in to the same wavelengths as students elsewhere, leaders of student opinion were sitting around discussing the Protestant/Catholic numbers game.²⁷⁴

Bernadette Devlin also remarked how debating and cultural societies at Queen's University, more than the Student Union or political clubs, were an important ideological breeding ground for students like her, who had recently gained an interest in local and international politics. "There was more real politics in the Folk Music Society than in any of the parties," she explained, "they sang black civil-rights songs about unemployment in Belfast long before the civil-rights movement took it up."²⁷⁵ Poor but educated, young Catholics such as Devlin found in international events a new perspective on the problem of sectarian discrimination. As a result of her participation in the debating societies, Devlin, who had grown up in a poor republican household in the Catholic heartland, became utterly hostile to the entire nationalist-unionist discourse. While the older McKeown drifted towards a form of liberal idealism,²⁷⁶ Devlin came to believe that the true cause of discrimination in Northern Ireland was not religious bigotry or constitutional issues so much as economics; the problem was capitalism itself. "It wasn't simply getting Britain out of Ireland that mattered," she wrote, "it was the fact that we were economically depressed."²⁷⁷ This belief in revolutionary socialism, however, led her to spurn some of her older republican values while at Queen's:

I began looking at the Ireland I wanted to unite, and I realized that the task was not to free the Six Counties but to start all over again the national revolution. There were no free counties anywhere in Ireland. The Irish had replaced the British in twenty six of the counties, but they had done nothing to change the

²⁷⁴ McKeown: *The Passion of Peace*, p.11-12.

²⁷⁵ Bernadette Devlin: *The Price of My Soul* (1969), p.76.

²⁷⁶ McKeown, *The Passion of Peace*, p. 27.

²⁷⁷ Devlin: *The Price of My Soul*, p.79.

system. [...] I didn't know what I was in favour of, but I knew I was against the system, which I hadn't yet learned enough jargon to term 'capitalism'. [...] The problem in Northern Ireland, I decided, was not partition. [...] What was the point of ending partition merely to alter the boundaries of injustice?²⁷⁸

While Devlin and her future New Left associates did share many of the concerns of the red republicans—unemployment, the rapaciousness of international trade and working-class unity, for instance—much hostility existed between the two groups, largely because of their respective choice of methods. While the red republicans sought to forge a broad coalition of anti-unionists to engineer the gradual transformation of Northern Ireland into a socialist republic, the New Leftists shared neither their patience nor their collaborative spirit. They also had little desire to reform institutions which they believed to be inherently anti-democratic in nature. While red republicans exercised caution, showed strong organisational skills, and preferred playing a supporting rather than a leading role in the civil rights campaign, the New Leftists were boisterous propagandists and firm proponents of immediate mass action. No one was as keenly aware of this difference as the communist Betty Sinclair, whose age and prudent moderation were repeatedly ridiculed by the young radicals.

Besides the particularities of campus life, television also played an important role in the mobilisation of the Northern Ireland New Left. While slightly older nationalists, such as Hume and Currie, had come of age in the optimistic era of John Kennedy, of Martin Luther King, Jr., and of the desegregation of the American Deep South, the younger PD activists were struck by a growing sense of pessimism in the world around them: apartheid in South Africa; a conservative Nixon in the White House; the ever-present threat of mutually assured nuclear destruction; unemployment at home; repression in

²⁷⁸ Ibid. p.88, 90

Prague; civil war in Biafra, Vietnam and Algeria... As both Michael Farrell and Ciaran McKeown have suggested, tyranny and cynicism seemed to have replaced freedom and optimism as the watchwords of a new era:

Television made the world a global village so that the new music, new styles and new ideas spread like wildfire. [...] But television also brought home the injustices of the world: the Sharpeville massacre by South African police in 1960; the tortures inflicted by the French army during the Algerian war of independence; the horrors of Vietnam. And we grew up under the shadow of the atomic bomb.²⁷⁹

In the world outside our little student world, the situation also seemed to be one of disintegration: Martin Luther King was shot dead in April [1968], Bobby Kennedy in June; in May came the strange event in France which the media presented as a 'revolution', flattering the contemporary militancy, and suggesting that 'The System' was about to be destroyed, with no indication of what might follow. In August the Russians rolled into Prague and crushed the Dubcek liberalisation process in Czechoslovakia. [...] In November the Americans elected Richard Nixon President. Tragedy on a terrible scale loomed in Biafra and Bangladesh.²⁸⁰

Influenced by American counterculture, the protest music of Bob Dylan and Joan Baez,²⁸¹ and the growth of student unrest throughout Europe, Belfast students looked at their own domestic political mess and found reason to be incensed. Many QUB students were further outraged by William Craig's ban of the university's republican club in 1967. By 9 October 1968 when the PD came into existence, it took very little persuasion to mobilize throngs of Queen's students of all political leanings onto the streets of Belfast. "I did not take much coaxing to become a student protestor," wrote PD member Eilis McDermot, "it was the thing to do in 1968."²⁸² McKeown agrees:

1968 was *the* year of student militancy: in May students had a genuine role in the 'revolution' that weakened de Gaulle in France; they were visible, vocal and brave in Dubcek's Czechoslovakia; in Germany, the Baader-Meinhof impulse was

²⁷⁹ Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.12.

²⁸⁰ McKeown: *The Passion of Peace*, p.44.

²⁸¹ Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.11.

²⁸² Eilis McDermott: "Law and Disorder," in Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.148.

alive. In Northern Ireland [...] the determined thoughtfulness of the foregoing years was giving way to increasingly dogmatic militancy...²⁸³

Before that fateful October day on which the People's Democracy was formed and protest became "the thing to do" at Queen's University, the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) and the Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) had already jumped onto the civil rights bandwagon. The leaders of both organisations (Eamonn McCann and Michael Farrell, respectively) had studied at Queen's, spent time in London, mingled with numerous Marxists there and participated in the British Labour party. London was an important crucible for Irish revolutionary socialists; many future members of the Irish New Left became friends while living in England. This was true of McCann, Farrell, Toman and Boyle, all future members of PD. While there, these up-and-coming New Leftists engaged in radical labour politics. "They were all in the Labour party," said Boyle in 1972, "because the theory was that they were going to infiltrate it. (It was rather like the movement in America in the Democratic Party.)"²⁸⁴

Upon their return to Ireland, both McCann and Farrell attempted to spread the radical socialist ideas they had imported from England—concerns such as nuclear disarmament, the Vietnam War, racism in Rhodesia, and the desire to push the Labour party further to the left.²⁸⁵ They were only partially successful in spreading these goals; the DHAC and YSA never acquired a very large membership, and McCann remained but a cog in the Northern Ireland Labour Party. Nonetheless, the move to direct-action protest, which

²⁸³ Emphasis in the original. McKeown: *The Passion of Peace*, p.41.

²⁸⁴ Kevin Boyle, interview with W.H. Van Voris (1972), in Van Voris: *Violence in Ulster, an Oral Documentary* (1975), p.61. Boyle seems to be referring to the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) movement, but does not mention it by name. For a first-hand account of the SDS, see Gitlin (1993).

²⁸⁵ A.H. Halsey and Stephen Marks: "British Student Politics," in S.M. Lipset and Philip G. Altbach, eds.: *Students in Revolt* (1969), p.44.

began in June 1968 with Austin Currie's illegal squat at Caledon, gave the New Left radicals a vehicle through which they could hope to disseminate their ideas widely.

The YSA was itself loosely modeled on an American organisation of the same name and was profoundly influenced by the Black Power ideology.²⁸⁶ Members of the YSA participated enthusiastically in the 24 August civil rights march from Coalisland-to-Dungannon. Having just returned from a pro-Czech rally, YSA members were all-the-more motivated to march for civil rights: "For us," wrote Farrell, "it was a symbolic fusing of the international student rebellion with the smouldering revolt against the specific grievances of Northern Ireland."²⁸⁷ YSA members even tried to unfurl a pro-Vietnamese National Liberation Front (or 'Viet-Cong') banner during that first march, but were compelled by NICRA stewards to put it away. A few months later, People's Democracy—with an important contingent of YSA members—would refuse, with disastrous consequences, the aid of NICRA stewards at a march they themselves organised in Newry.

In the province's second largest city, the Derry Housing Action Committee had, by October 1968, become infamous for its anti-homelessness summer campaign that led to the arrest of Eamonn McCann, Eamon Melaugh, and Finnbar O'Doherty. The court case, interestingly enough, occurred during the same week as the highly publicised

²⁸⁶ The concept of working class activism espoused by the YSA, and even its name, were borrowed in large part from African-American Marxists. According to Bob Purdie, the writings of George Breitman had a marked influence on Farrell's ideology. Breitman was a radical African-American Marxist, a populariser of the ideas of Malcolm X, and a proponent of Black Power nationalism. See for example "The National Question and the Black Liberation Struggle in the United States," (undated), in Breitman: *Black Nationalism and Socialism*, 1968, p.5, 13; and "How a Minority Can Change Society" (date unknown), calling for the African-American working class to make "the system so inconvenient and expensive that white people will be forced to ask themselves whether continued discrimination is worthwhile." Quoted from Bob Purdie: *Politics in the Streets* (1990), p.231.

²⁸⁷ Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.20.

manslaughter conviction of American Black Panther leader Huey Newton.²⁸⁸ The DHAC triumvirate of McCann, Melaugh and O’Doherty went on to become the main organisers of the 5 October 1968 civil rights march in Derry. Their agenda, if not widely proclaimed at the time, was to challenge the political hegemony of Nationalists over the Derry Catholic electorate. To do so, they aimed to provoke the local authorities into overreaction and consequently to increase support for radical socialism among the region’s impoverished working class:

If we could force the police to act against us we could be certain of an upsurge of sympathy which would further weaken the nationalist grip on the area. [...] Our conscious, if unspoken, strategy was to provoke the police into over-reaction. [...] The one certain way to ensure a head-on clash with the authorities was to organise a non-unionist march through the city centre.²⁸⁹

Though the overall turnout was rather small, activists of the New Left persuasion showed up in significant numbers at Derry’s Waterside station, many of them with the resolve to “spark off a mass response.”²⁹⁰ In keeping with the heterogeneous nature of New Left rhetoric, they carried placards reading, “South Africa – Rhodesia – Ulster – [three swastikas]”, “We Shall Overcome Someday”, “Smash Capitalism” and “Class Not Creed”.²⁹¹ “I don’t want anyone to charge that [police] barricade,” shouted McCann to the crowd minutes before the police assault, “I also want to make it clear, as a private individual, that I can’t do anything to stop them.”²⁹² The declaration was defiant, a glove thrown at the authorities rather than a call for self-control, as the resulting behaviour of

²⁸⁸ While I have not uncovered direct evidence that McCann and his friends compared themselves to the Black Panther Party leader at that time, McCann was to become a strong supporter of the Black Panthers during the following years, and would meet with some of its members in 1970. See *Irish Times*, 4 March 1970.

²⁸⁹ Eamonn McCann: *War and an Irish Town* (1974), p.33-35.

²⁹⁰ Eamonn McCann: “October 5th and After,” *Irish Times*, 6 October 1971. Reprinted as “After 5 October 1968,” in *International Socialism* 51, April-June 1972.

²⁹¹ *Irish Times*, 7 October 1968.

²⁹² *Irish Times*, 7 October 1968.

the marchers indicates.²⁹³ During the violence that ensued, wrote the *Irish Times*, “some of the marchers went in groups of two or three through the town to the Diamond, one group with a C.N.D. (Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament) banner. [...] Opening the banner, they carried it round the war memorial.”²⁹⁴

Banners and flags have played an important role in Northern Ireland public processions for centuries. The PD continued this trend but, to mark their distinctiveness, they used neither the red communist flag nor the green-white-and-gold republican tricolour. Their symbol of choice was the blue and white Starry Plough, a flag popularized a half-century earlier by the revolutionary socialist James Connolly. For many New Leftists, Connolly was a home-made version of a Che Guevara, a Ho Chi Minh, or a Daniel Cohn-Bendit—the revolutionary heroes of the New Left. The Starry Plough was displayed at the 5 October 1968 march, during the August 1969 ‘Battle of the Bogside’ and on numerous PD communications.²⁹⁵

The events of 5 October 1968 were to have major ramifications on the future of the province, particularly in providing the spark that would lead to the formation of PD. Because it adopted a highly decentralized power structure, and because it had no formal leadership—only an elected ‘faceless committee’ that held no executive powers—the PD was to become, less than three months after its birth, the organ of a small but dedicated band of radical socialists. Within a few short weeks, the PD’s most radical members—namely Farrell, Toman, McCann, Devlin and Boyle—were firmly in control of its

²⁹³ See Chapter 1, Section V: *Politics in the Streets* (i.e.: page 22, footnote number 55).

²⁹⁴ *Irish Times*, 7 October 1968.

²⁹⁵ See *Irish Times*, 7 October 1968, and the Scarman Tribunal’s Report (Government of Northern Ireland: *Violence and Civil Disturbances in 1969*), 1972, p.78. The Starry Plough has also been used by various labour unions over the past century and is today the symbol of the Irish Republican Socialist Movement and its paramilitary wing, the Irish National Liberation Army. See Peter Urban: *Irish Republican Socialist Movement Turns Twenty-Five*. 10 December 1999. <<http://irelandsown.net/IRSM.htm>> [23 September 2005].

agenda. “The stage was being set,” wrote McKeown despondently, “for a disastrous phase of so-called ‘nonviolent’ civil rights activity”:

I had put in years of effort, had accompanied Gerry Fitt on the first ‘civil rights tour’ with four Westminster MPs the previous year, yet here I was, at twenty five years of age, being regarded by sloganizing twenty-year-olds well manipulated by others my own age, as almost an old fogey.²⁹⁶

The Belfast-based PD remained a zealously dedicated civil rights ginger group throughout the fall of 1968, but kept its distance from the nationalist-dominated Derry Citizens Action Committee (DCAC) and the socialists, communists and republicans leading NICRA. The PD inner core cared little for actual reforms; they were far too deeply committed to the destruction of Unionism to negotiate terms with the ruling elite. This is why the PD launched the Belfast-to-Derry march on 1-4 January 1969, which was indeed a deliberate attempt to imitate the American Selma-to-Montgomery march of 1965, though not as it is usually understood. In their desire to hold such a march the PD were fully aware that the American march to Selma, under the influence of SNCC radicals, had purposefully provoked white supremacist and police violence so as to discredit them.

The Belfast-to-Derry march marked a definitive turning point in the Northern Ireland civil rights movement, after which the common front, made up of constitutional nationalists, red republicans, and New Left radicals, utterly collapsed. Numerous reasons can be found to explain the divisions between these three groups, some of which were generational and others personal. There is little doubt, however, that the radical and confrontational attitude of the People’s Democracy leadership played the most significant role in bringing about the collapse of the civil rights consensus.

²⁹⁶ McKeown: *The Passion of Peace*, p.42.

III. THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY AND THE WORLD BEYOND

Members of the People's Democracy came to see themselves as part of "the Spirit of the Worldwide youth revolt of 1968."²⁹⁷ The Parisian student rebellions had a particularly profound impact on the psyche of the Northern Ireland New Leftists. Not only did local and foreign journalists flood into Belfast and Derry after 5 October 1968, recalls McCann, "trying to identify a local Danny the Red (The May events in France were fresh in their memory),"²⁹⁸ PD members were also keen to recognize the 'Paris' within themselves. "Fred Taggart, president of the Queen's students' union [in 1969], was our Danny the Red," wrote Eilis McDermott,²⁹⁹ while Inez McCormack called Bernadette Devlin, not Taggart, Northern Ireland's answer to the French student radical.³⁰⁰ The PD had "a Sorbonne-inspired belief in spontaneity," wrote McCann,³⁰¹ and Devlin spoke of Cyril Toman, the "second in command of the Belfast Left," along with the other members of the YSA as having a sort of Sorbonne fixation.³⁰² Following the 4 January loyalist attack at Burntollet bridge, battered and bleeding PD members pushed on towards Derry city, no longer chanting 'We Shall Overcome' but, in the spirit of Paris, the 'Internationale'.³⁰³ Farrell also claimed, following PD's bid to contest electoral seats during the 1969 Stormont general election, that

PD is not just part of the Civil Rights movement, it is a revolutionary association. Its formation was considerably influenced by the Sorbonne Assembly and by

²⁹⁷ Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.22.

²⁹⁸ i.e.: Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a leader of the anti-Gaullist Parisian youth revolt of May 1968. McCann: *War and an Irish Town*, p.43.

²⁹⁹ Eilis McDermott: "Law and Disorder," in Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On*, p.148.

³⁰⁰ Inez McCormack: "Faceless Men: Civil Rights and After," in Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On*, p.28.

³⁰¹ McCann: *War and an Irish Town*, p.50.

³⁰² Devlin: *The Price of My Soul*, p.123-4.

³⁰³ On Northern Ireland, see Devlin (1969), p.150; On Paris, see Belden Fields: "The Revolution Betrayed: the French Student Revolt of May-June 1968," in S.M. Lipset and Philip G. Altbach, eds.: *Students in Revolt* (1969), p.134.

concepts of libertarianism as well as socialism [while the 1969 Stormont election] represented a Gaullist-type strategy on the part of O'Neill.³⁰⁴

The PD New Leftists were also heavily influenced by the African-American Black Power ideology and the confrontational style of the Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC). In organising a Belfast-to-Derry march along the lines of the 1965 Selma-to-Montgomery march in America, it was not within the moderate spirit of integration, promulgated by Dr. King and the moderate Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), that the PD leaders intended to march:

We in the Young Socialists/People's Democracy identified particularly with the younger, more radical Student Non-violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) who like us were in regular conflict with the older, more cautious leaders of Martin Luther King's Southern Christian Leadership Conference. But King and SNCC chairman John Lewis had marched together from Selma to Montgomery in Alabama in 1965, and the violence of the racist state troopers who blocked that march had caused such outrage across the US that President Lyndon Johnson had been forced to push through the Voting Rights Act. The march to Derry was modelled on the Selma-Montgomery march and we hoped it would have a similar effect.³⁰⁵

In the months following the loyalist ambush of civil rights marchers on 4 January 1969, members of the PD expressed growing support for African-American radicals, with whom they initiated communication in the fall of 1969. Bernadette Devlin, visiting the United States as Britain's youngest-ever MP (while she was awaiting trial for her role in the August 1969 'Battle of the Bogside'), chose not to meet with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley as planned but to visit Black Panther Angela Davis instead, who was in prison at the time. This caused a significant stir in Irish-American circles.³⁰⁶ A few months later, Eamonn McCann met with Black Panther Robert Bay and gave him the key to New York

³⁰⁴ Devlin *et al*: "People's Democracy: A Discussion on Strategy," *New Left Review*, No. 55 (May/June 1969), p.4, 15.

³⁰⁵ Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.57.

³⁰⁶ Bernadette Devlin-McAliskey: "A Peasant in the Halls of the Great," in Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On*, p.87. See also Chapter 3, section II: *Civil Rights and the Irish American Community* (p.61-62).

City that Mayor John Lindsay had given to Devlin on her previous visit. The key, said McCann, was offered by the PD “as a gesture of solidarity with the black liberation and revolutionary socialist movement in America.”³⁰⁷

In addition to their sympathies with African-American radicals, members of the PD saw themselves as the ideological offspring of Asian, African, and Latin American revolutionaries. While the Soviet repression of Hungarian (1956) and Czech (1968) protestors drew the ire of Northern Ireland New Leftists, the example of Che Guevara, of Mao Tse Tung, and of the leaders of Nicaraguan and South African liberation movements inspired them to new heights.³⁰⁸ “To the more politicised of the ‘60s generation,” wrote Farrell,

things no longer seemed hopeless: imperialist powers could be beaten or forced to retreat after all. And the choice now was not just between Western Capitalism and East European Stalinism; there was also Che’s humanistic socialism, [...] the writings of Leon Trotsky, [...and the Cultural Revolution in] China. [...] We believed that our generation could change the world and that students could be the catalysts in setting off a social and political revolution.³⁰⁹

“The heroic struggle of the Argentinean revolutionary,” wrote Farrell of Che Guevara, “moved a whole generation of youths across the world.”³¹⁰ “Our aim” said also Liam Baxter to the *New Left Review*, “must be to create a socialist republic, something on the lines of Cuba.”³¹¹ The Belfast-to-Derry march had also been called the ‘Long March’ by several PD members, evoking their will to emulate, at least symbolically, the example of

³⁰⁷ “Miss Devlin’s Key Goes to Black Panthers,” *Irish Times*, 4 March 1970.

³⁰⁸ i.e.: the Sandinista National Liberation Front and the African National Congress. See *PD Voice*, June and August 1969.

³⁰⁹ Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.13.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.* p.11

³¹¹ Devlin *et al*: “People’s Democracy: A Discussion on Strategy,” *New Left Review*, No. 55 (May/June 1969), p.14.

Chinese communists whose arduous 6000 kilometre trek through Northern China allowed them to build a solid support base among the Chinese peasantry in 1935.³¹²

The PD protesters' awareness of foreign events was far-ranging indeed, but it was also somewhat superficial. Summary references to all forms of tyranny and discrimination abroad appear frequently in their writings, but profound analysis is too often lacking. Chanting "Sieg Heil, RUC, SS, RUC,"³¹³ the PD radicals saw themselves as members of a wide crusade against a fascist new world order: "Adolf Hitler promised [the German people] stability and law and order," wrote Farrell in 1972,

He blamed their troubles on an 'alien' minority and his armed thugs promised to suppress any agitation or disturbance. [...] Craig, Paisley and McKeague preach the same gospel. The danger is that Protestant workers and farmers, betrayed by their leaders who have lied to them for so long, will turn in despair to Orange fascism.³¹⁴

While Unionists did share much responsibility in maintaining the sectarian economic hierarchy that PD was trying to breach, it is questionable that their methods ever approached those of the German Nazis. One can wonder if certain references to global events were not, to a certain extent, being used arbitrarily by the PD leaders to justify their confrontational tactics.

IV. THE INIMICAL NEW LEFT AGENDA

While PD leaders unquestioningly saw themselves as an integral part of the international New Left, they never elaborated a comprehensive and long-term program for change. Revolutionary action, not theory, was from the beginning their principal *cheval-de-guerre*. Besides seeking to break down the established power of Orange,

³¹² See McKeown: *The Passion of Peace*, p. 46; Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.11; and Devlin: *The Price of My Soul*, p.153, as well as "A Peasant in the Halls of the Great," in Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On*, p.76.

³¹³ McKeown: *The Passion of Peace*, p.50.

³¹⁴ Farrell: *Struggle in the North*, p.18.

Green, and Red elites and to replace them with an egalitarian socialist system, the Northern Ireland New Left as a community was theoretically short-sighted. Bernadette Devlin conceded this much as early as the spring of 1969:

We are totally disorganized and totally without any form of discipline within ourselves. I'd say that there are hardly two of us who really agree [...] nobody really knows what they do want and nobody is prepared to organize: we are all madly tearing off—nowhere.³¹⁵

In the period when it most needed to develop discipline and a long-term vision, the PD never did so, nor did it benefit from the far-sighted organisation skills of a John Hume or a Roy Johnston. Moving indiscriminately from protest to protest while hoping each time to create a crisis that would fritter-away the Unionist consensus seemed to be the PD leadership's primary, if not its only, game plan. Despite its intention to secure dignity and welfare for the Irish working class, the PD's lack of a clear roadmap helped turn its idealistic drive towards social justice into an irresponsible joyride down the troubled paths of sectarianism.

Outside the small radical socialist community, the PD received little widespread support as far as its revolutionary socialist convictions were concerned. Ironically, its large and clamorous rallies often served as an outlet for traditional republican outrage at a time when the republican leadership had laid its guns aside to play politics. The radical spirit of PD, coupled with its vague constitutional agenda, was also easily misinterpreted by unruly youths who often joined PD protests for the mere excitement of thumbing their noses at the police and inciting riots. This seems to have been the case at Newry on 11 January 1969, and again during the summer months in Derry and Belfast.

³¹⁵ Devlin *et al.*: "People's Democracy: A Discussion on Strategy," *New Left Review*, No. 55 (May/June 1969), p.8.

Nonetheless, this did not seem to overly bother the PD leadership, save perhaps Eamonn McCann. So long as the people were willing to follow the New Leftists on their venture to topple the Unionists, it mattered little whether or not they shared in the revolutionary socialist dream; they would in time—or so it was thought.

While the PD radicals embraced youth and the working class as their power base, they were irreconcilably opposed to the leaders of the Catholic middle-class (or ‘Green Tories’), even those who participated arduously in civil rights protests. The New Leftists believed that nationalists had deeply vested interests in maintaining “the whole sectarian setup.”³¹⁶ Farrell later observed that “the Nationalists have no intention of trying to overthrow an economic system out of which most of them are doing well,”³¹⁷ while Devlin suggested that “both the Protestant Unionists and the Catholic Nationalists deny they discriminate against each other, but both use religion to divide and rule the working class.”³¹⁸ The nationalist ‘politicians’ who embraced the principles of social democracy, such as Hume, Fitt and Currie, also received strong criticism from Devlin:

In spite of their ‘civil-rights’ label, the politicians had demanded *Catholic* equality and majority rule for *Catholic* areas. People like myself had not come to support such demands. [...] We were more politically aware than ‘the leaders’ in that we refused to accept their logic that the problem could be seen in terms of Catholic versus Protestant.³¹⁹

As a newly elected Westminster MP, Devlin was particularly hostile towards Stormont MP Austin Currie, her parliamentary counterpart for County Tyrone:

After all the work the PD had done in the [1969 Stormont] general election to break down religious bigotry and end the old vote-for-your-religion tradition, I

³¹⁶ Letter by DHAC member Eamon Melaugh to *Irish News*, 30 September 1968, in Alan Scott: *Calendar of Newspaper Articles Dealing with Civil Rights Issues, 1 Jun 1968 —9 Dec 1968*. CAIN Web Services, <cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/newspapers/scott.htm> [09/12/2004].

³¹⁷ Farrell: *Struggle in the North*, p.26-7.

³¹⁸ Devlin: *The Price of my Soul*, p.54.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.* p.96

couldn't bear to see Austin Currie go rampaging around and undo it in the name of our cause.³²⁰

Cyril Toman did express some respect for MP Gerry Fitt, but despite the man's cross-community appeal, Toman found him too timid a socialist to be fully effective in tackling the roots of discrimination.³²¹ A deep enmity also divided Eamonn McCann and Derry nationalists such as John Hume. McCann believed them to be largely responsible for perpetuating sectarianism, discrimination, and poverty among Derry Catholics. In speaking of the militant DHAC, McCann writes:

We were anxious to assert socialist ideas [...] The intention [of the 5 October 1968 march] was to draw a clear line between ourselves and the Nationalist Party to prevent pan-Catholic unity. [...] We had a real hope that the socialist movement we were going to build after, and partly as a result of, the march would engage Protestant support.³²²

To demand an end to discrimination was to suggest that Catholics should get more jobs, houses, and voting power than they had at the time—and *Protestants less*. This simple mathematical calculation did not seem to occur to the leaders of the civil rights movement. [...] The only program with any potential to undercut sectarianism and make contact with the consciousness of the Protestant working class would have been one which linked the demands for fair distribution of the relevant commodities to demands designed to increase absolutely the number of jobs and houses available for distribution. [...] In a phrase, it would have involved a comprehensive radical anti-capitalist programme.³²³

Hume was also accused by Boyle of having “snuffed out” the movement in Derry when he and the DCAC suspended all further marches in December 1968.³²⁴ The ‘Green Tory’

³²⁰ Ibid. p.176

³²¹ Devlin *et al.*: “People’s Democracy: A Discussion on Strategy,” *New Left Review*, No. 55 (May/June 1969), p.8.

³²² McCann: *War and an Irish Town*, p.38-39.

³²³ McCann “After 5 October 1968,” *International Socialism* 51 (April-June 1972).

³²⁴ Kevin Boyle, interview with W.H. Van Voris (1972), in Van Voris: *Violence in Ulster, an Oral Documentary* (1975), p.82.

label was extended to the Republic's Fianna Fáil government and to the Irish-American community.³²⁵

By initiating marches through strongly nationalist areas such as Derry (5 October 1968) and Newry (11 January 1969), as well as planning an aborted Belfast-to-Dublin 'long march' to take place in April 1969, the New Leftists intended "to hammer this point home—that injustice is not confined to Unionist-controlled areas."³²⁶ "It was an attempt," added Boyle "to tell people that they [the PD] were not one-sided."³²⁷ The PD brass was thus reluctant to collaborate with gentrified Catholic nationalists, all of whom, they believed, intended "to secure a Green Tory united Ireland."³²⁸

Our system is one in which the basic divide is thought to be along religious lines, in which it is quite rational for a man to believe he is sentenced to unemployment for the crime of being a Catholic. But he is not. He is sentenced to unemployment because there are not enough jobs because investment is made on grounds of profit, not on grounds of people's needs. [...] By aligning themselves with those who work against their interests but share their religion, the working class of my country, Protestant and Catholic, perpetuates its own misery.³²⁹

When it was founded, PD was declared to have no official position on the subject of partition. As the role of New Leftist grew within the organisation, it became increasingly republican in its outlook. Amidst the urban violence of late 1969 that tore the IRA into warring factions, the PD inched its way closer to the republican position:

The People's Democracy, which has been active in the struggle for civil rights, for more jobs and houses, and against Toryism, North and South, believes that its objectives can only be obtained by the ousting of both Tory governments and the establishment of an Irish Socialist Republic. [...] Only large-scale public ownership and control of the flow of profit and capital out of the area can end the shortages. However, Northern Ireland is by itself unviable and this strategy

³²⁵ See also chapter 3, section II. Devlin-McAliskey, "A Peasant in the Halls of the Great," in Farrell, ed.: *Twenty Years On*, p.87. On 'Green Tories' in the Irish Republic, see: *Belfast Telegraph*, 2, 11, and 27 November 1968 and *Irish News*, 5 November 1968.

³²⁶ Peoples' Democracy: *Why PD?* (1969).

³²⁷ *Irish Times*, 2 April 1969.

³²⁸ Farrell: *Struggle in the North*, p.32.

³²⁹ Devlin: *The Price of my Soul*, p.96, 107.

would have to be applied over the large area of Ireland as a whole [...] The struggle for a Socialist Republic links the economic class-consciousness of the Protestant workers with the anti-imperialist outlook of Republicans. [...] British economic interests now control the economy of the South. [...] We must... heighten the struggle against economic imperialism there, breaking the British—and US—control over the Republic’s actions, and to change the Tory nature of the state [...] to secure a socialist republic...³³⁰

Such statements were similar to those proclaimed by red republicans but a few years earlier, but few members of PD ever participated in—or expressed support for—the ‘Official’ republican movement or for the Communist Party of Ireland. There were indeed many similarities between the PD’s revolutionary position and that of the red republicans, but collaboration between the two groups was rare and conflictual. Eamonn McCann, for instance, believed that the republican ‘Stages Theory’, aimed at the incremental abolition of the border, was timid, counterproductive and nonsensical:³³¹

Grafting the crude Stalinist theorising of Roy Johnston, et al onto the republican tradition, they strove to guide all mass agitation in the North into a struggle for ‘democratization’. They, too, denied vehemently that the national question was of any relevance. And, in their efforts to build a ‘broad-based movement for reform’, they emerged as the most bitter opponents of suggested agitation within the civil rights movement on economic class issues.³³²

The pursuit of respectability by communists at home and abroad greatly upset the radical New Leftists. “Instead of moving to the left [...] and adopting clearly working class policies,” stated an unsigned 1972 People’s Democracy position paper, the progress of Goulding’s ‘official’ republican movement seemed “to have stopped dead”:

This can be explained by the influence of the Communist Party on their movement. [...] The C.P. and the Officials have moved closer together until today. They jointly control NICRA in the North and anti-E.E.C. committees and

³³⁰ *People’s Democracy Conference, October 12th* [1969], reprinted in Paul Arthur: *The Peoples’ Democracy* (1974), p.132-3.

³³¹ McCann: *War and an Irish Town*, p.240.

³³² McCann “After 5 October 1968,” *International Socialism 51* (April-June 1972), p.11. This article is an expanded version of an earlier article titled “October 5th and After,” *Irish Times*, 6 October 1971, and this portion does not appear in the latter.

other front organisations in the South. All over the world to-day the orthodox communist parties are noted for their craving for respectability and their dedication to the Parliamentary road to socialism. [...] This attitude was seen at its clearest in France in 1969 when the C.P. viciously attacked the student revolutionaries and the workers who supported them.³³³

The NICRA executive was snubbed on numerous occasions by the PD radicals. Before 5 October 1968, said McCann, “the [NI]CRA did nothing except issue press statements calling on the Unionist Government to be a bit more liberal.”³³⁴ In response to calls by NICRA chairman Betty Sinclair to leave the 5 October gathering peacefully so as to avoid clashing with the police, Farrell recalls feeling outraged:

We were not having that. It was 1968, the year of the student revolutions in Paris and Prague, of Mexico City and the Chicago Democratic Convention. We did not think of ourselves in quite that league but going home peacefully meant letting Bill Craig and the RUC walk all over us.³³⁵

Sinclair, whose “main activity as chairman of the CRA seemed to be sending telegrams to Harold Wilson,”³³⁶ was singled-out and criticized by the PD inner circle, along with a few other NICRA communists, for what they perceived to be timid reformism: “We do not want reform of Northern Ireland,” said Farrell following his successful attempt to oust Sinclair from the NICRA executive, “we want a revolution in Ireland and we will not get that by any Westminster intervention.”³³⁷ The Wolfe Tone Society was also criticized for similar reasons:

The WTS was considered too high-brow for many rank and file activists. It was most certainly an elite of activists and thinkers, who believed that moral and

³³³ “People’s Democracy: What it Stands for, its Attitudes,” (1972), p.2-13. Author unknown.

³³⁴ Devlin *et al*: “People’s Democracy: A Discussion on Strategy,” *New Left Review*, No. 55 (May/June 1969), p.3.

³³⁵ Farrell: *Twenty Years On*, p.55.

³³⁶ Devlin : *The Price of My Soul*, p.155.

³³⁷ Devlin *et al*: “People’s Democracy: A Discussion on Strategy,” *New Left Review*, No. 55 (May/June 1969), p.17

intellectual force alone would eventually win the day against undemocratic practices and economic injustices.³³⁸

Red republicans and New Leftists were fated from the start not to get along. The immediate goal of the red republicans, through the agency of ‘respectable’ and moderate organisations such as the NICRA and Wolfe Tone Societies, was to create a broad-based coalition that would help Northern Ireland slowly evolve into a non-sectarian socialist state. It was only after the Unionists and their foreign patrons were to be rendered politically harmless that the red republicans could think of putting an end to partition. This could all be done, they hoped, without the need for bloodshed.

Nonetheless, the red republican ideology was virulently attacked by the New Leftists. They considered it a timid compromise with the nationalists as well as a severe lack of revolutionary zeal. Leaders of PD assumed somewhat naïvely that if only they bravely led the way in the epic showdown between the Northern Irish working class and the capitalists, ‘The People’, both Catholic and Protestant, would naturally join them in toppling the Orange system to make way for their (loosely-defined) socialist utopia.

Of course, this all seemed quite ludicrous to the PD’s detractors, and to many contemporary researchers as well, but then again it *was* ‘the thing to do’ in 1968.

³³⁸ Fionnbarra Ó Dochartaigh (Finnbar O’Doherty) : *Ulster’s White Negroes: from Civil Rights to Insurrection* (1994), p.30.

CONCLUSION

DISCRIMINATION, CIVIL RIGHTS, AND THE GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

*The basic disagreement between Protestants and Catholics about discrimination in Northern Ireland suggests that the dispute may be less about the 'facts' of the situation than it is about the definition of what constitutes fair treatment.*³³⁹

By examining the writings and speeches of former civil rights activists, we see that although sectarianism did continue to play a large part in shaping popular self-perceptions in Northern Ireland during the 1960s, a growing number of its residents had already begun, as early as 1963, to turn their backs on traditional nationalist values and to search for a new, inclusive definition of Irishness. To do so, leaders of the civil rights movement adopted and promoted the 'foreign' concepts of racial harmony, human rights, decolonization, national liberation, and radical democratic socialism.

While there is much disagreement in the literature over the level of discrimination that existed in Northern Ireland leading up to the civil rights movement,³⁴⁰ authors such as John Whyte, Bob Purdie and Richard Rose³⁴¹ have convincingly argued that discriminatory practices had gone on with much the same intensity for nearly four decades. Certainly, the significant lack of popular support for the republican border campaign of 1956-62 suggests that Unionist discrimination was not sufficiently

³³⁹ Richard Rose: *Governing Without Consensus* (1971), p.273.

³⁴⁰ See for instance the virulent exchange between Christopher Hewitt ("Catholic Grievances, Catholic Nationalism and Violence in Northern Ireland During the Civil Rights Period: A Reconsideration," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.32, no.3, 1981; "Discrimination in Northern Ireland: A Rejoinder," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.34, no.3, 1983. "Catholic Grievances and Violence in Northern Ireland," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.36, no.1, 1985), Denis O'Hearn ("Catholic Grievances, Catholic Nationalism: A Comment," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.34, no.3, 1983; "Again on Discrimination in Northern Ireland: A Reply to the Rejoinder," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.36, no.1, 1985), and Kassian Kovalcheck ("Catholic Grievances and Violence in Northern Ireland: Appraisal and Judgment," *British Journal of Sociology*, vol.38, no.1, 1987).

³⁴¹ See works by John Whyte: "How Much Discrimination Was There Under the Unionist Regime, 1921-68?" in Tom Gallagher and James O'Connell, eds.: *Contemporary Irish Studies*, (1983); Bob Purdie: *Politics in the Streets* (1990); and Richard Rose: *Governing Without Consensus: An Irish Perspective* (1971).

intolerable in the early sixties to drive large numbers of Northern Catholics into the revolutionary fold. A more important issue to consider, then, is not the extent of actual discrimination but the changing perception of those who suddenly came to believe that discrimination in Northern Ireland had exceeded its tolerable limits. While there is little doubt that discrimination had occurred and did occur, the reasons for which many Northern Catholics and some Protestants reacted the way they did, when they did, had much more to do with what they were reading in the papers and watching on television than with what was being decided by any of the province's Unionist-controlled municipal councils.

Bob Purdie, the foremost authority on the history of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement, did not probe very deeply into the international aspects of the movement, but a handful of other authors, such as Owen Dudley Edwards, Paul Arthur, Andrew J. Wilson and Brian Dooley, have attempted to do so. Each of their works reveals a part of the complex web of foreign influence that distinguished the Northern Ireland civil rights movements from all previous anti-partitionist campaigns. It was, in fact, the civil rights movement's fierce opposition to sectarianism, steeped in the international rhetoric of non-violence, human rights, and national liberation, that prevented the Unionist authorities from dismissing it out of hand. Until 1963, armed revolutionaries could be arrested, interned, and easily discredited. Children holding placards, women singing African-American freedom songs, and unarmed students getting clubbed by policemen could not be so easily dismissed, particularly in the age of television. Nonetheless, as the civil rights camp grew, so did the number of loyalists willing to put down this so-called seditious conspiracy with every means at their disposal. As loyalist violence was

unleashed and armed republican paramilitaries re-entered the political landscape, the civil rights movement, because of its commitment to non-violence and democracy, was unable to maintain popular support in the midst of a bitter civil war.

The short life span and mitigated successes of the Northern Ireland civil rights movement are best explained by the fact that it was a deeply divided coalition. The narrow strip of ground on which the movement stood united in the fall of 1968 eroded as quickly as it had appeared. It never did develop strong, central leadership such as the American movement had in Martin Luther King, Jr., and it was easily splintered by internecine squabbles over methodology and the fear of loyalist violence. Forging a strong and united movement proved, in the end, impossible to achieve, mainly because the movement had, like some three-headed mutant, no single long-term vision under which an anti-Unionist majority could unite.

This thesis has argued that the Northern Ireland civil rights movement was, as far as its leadership was concerned, not primarily driven by nationalist goals, even though most of its members opposed partition. It came about, rather, because of a significant ideological shift to the left within the non-Unionist population of Northern Ireland. This burgeoning socialism was heavily influenced by political struggles and ideological trends taking shape in the world beyond Irish shores, such as human rights, decolonization, national liberation, and the New Left movement. These ideological trends were adopted in part by several groups that already held conflicting political positions, whether these be nationalism, republicanism, communism or liberalism. These anti-Unionist communities evolved into a broad civil rights coalition partly because none of the traditional opponents

of the sectarian regime—namely the Nationalist Party, the Northern Ireland Labour Party, and the Irish Republican Army—had managed to alter in any significant way the living standards of the Northern Ireland working-class, especially in areas where poor Catholics abounded.

This being said, it is crucial to understand the role international events played in bringing this movement to life. The world that came to Northern Ireland in the sixties was a complex patchwork of ideologies that further exacerbated the generational and ideological divisions which already existed in the statelet. For a large number of Northern Ireland Catholics and a few Protestants, foreign events challenged and transformed their understanding of the nature of unionism, of sectarianism, and of discrimination in the province. By joining in what seemed to them a world-wide movement against right-wing tyranny, the civil rights protestors of Northern Ireland believed that social justice could be achieved through a democratic transformation of the state from a reactionary Unionist regime to a more socialist, democratic, and pluralist system. The secondary issue of the border would resolve itself naturally and peacefully, many hoped, if the Unionist elite could be compelled to renounce the unfair practices that perpetuated its stranglehold on local and provincial institutions. And yet, this global movement to which the Northern Ireland civil rights movement allegedly belonged was defined in very different ways by constitutional nationalists, red republicans, and radical New Leftists. Some might say there were three, not one, civil rights campaigns operating at once in the province, each driven by a distinct and exclusive agenda.

The Northern Ireland civil rights movement has not been altogether ignored by the historical literature, but it has remained, to this day, a subject of secondary importance in Irish historiography. All too often has the movement been discussed solely in the light of the sectarian problem or as an introduction to the period of the Troubles. Our understanding of the civil rights movement as a broad coalition of socialists, and as the fruit of the international protest culture of the late sixties, has suffered because of this. Bob Purdie was right to warn us that the Northern Ireland of the sixties is “a lost world in which most of the political landmarks are different [than those of the Troubles] and different assumptions and aspirations underpin politics.”³⁴² As post-Troubles Northern Ireland enters a new era in which sectarianism might perhaps begin to wane, we can hope that the civil rights movement, as an anti-sectarian force, will stir-up greater interest and research in the years to come.

³⁴² Purdie: *Politics in the Streets*, p.1.

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