

Sectarian Violence and the People's Democracy, 1968-72

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Thesis  
Submitted to the Faculty of the  
Department of History of Vanderbilt University  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for Honors in History

April 2011

On the basis of this thesis  
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May 4, 2011 we, the  
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## Introduction

During the late 1960s and early 1970s, the Civil Rights Movement rose and fell in Northern Ireland, polarizing the population into Catholic nationalists and Protestant unionists and leading to the violence of the Troubles. At the height of this movement, a student based civil rights organization developed at Queen's University, Belfast called the People's Democracy (PD). The group first emerged in October 1968 as an idealistic student group, with slight socialist leanings but little experience or grounded ideology. In January 1969, the group organized and led the Long March from Belfast to Londonderry/Derry, which became one of the worst incidents of sectarian violence during the Civil Rights Era. Afterwards, as sectarian violence rose and the Westminster government responded with the deployment of British troops and internment, the organization became increasingly extreme in ideology and was more given to intentionally provoking and engaging in violence. The PD expanded its membership beyond its moderate student base and its ideals beyond civil rights to push for a free and united socialist republic. However, the PD continued to struggle under the pressures of sectarianism and ultimately failed to make a significant impact on the divided Irish society.

This thesis examines how the experience of sectarian violence affected the development of the People's Democracy. It asks how the members' experience witnessing sectarian violence, enduring physical harm, and taking up violent action themselves changed their view of the crisis in Northern Ireland and how they saw their role in it. After the Long March, PD politics became more radical while their actions grew more militant. The members came to perceive violence as an effective strategy. They saw sectarianism and violent tendencies deeply embedded into the Irish people and culture, yet, sought to transcend sectarianism through socialist ideology. They endeavored to negotiate the sectarian divide through reworking the traditional Irish narrative of

sectarian conflict into a socialist history. Yet ultimately, they failed to overcome sectarianism in the Irish people and within their own group. Their continued experience of sectarian violence and their own emphasis on history drove them closer to militant nationalist groups and further from their original goals of freeing all the lower classes from social and economic oppression.

Historians have produced a rich literature on the events of 1968 to 1972 when the Troubles arose out of the Civil Rights Movement. From the first studies of the period, scholars have sought to determine what caused the outbreak of violence and the polarization of the population. In this search to “explain the violence,” they have often been tempted to place responsibility on one or the other sects.<sup>1</sup> The first notable debate occurred during the 1980s when *The British Journal of Sociology* published a series of articles by Christopher Hewitt, Denis O’Hearn, and Kassian Kovalcheck. Hewitt argues that nationalism rather than discrimination drove the Catholic led Civil Rights Movement and its breakdown into violence.<sup>2</sup> O’Hearn counters by emphasizing the reality and depth of the discrimination against Catholics by the Protestant majority.<sup>3</sup> Kovalcheck points out the flaws of their debate, saying that the main question was not whether nationalism or discrimination were factors, but which of these factors took priority in causing the outbreak of violence.<sup>4</sup> Within this debate, the authors struggle to achieve distance from the violence of the ongoing Troubles.

In subsequent decades, historians Richard English, Bob Purdie, and Niall Ó Dochartaigh, elaborated on these original arguments to explain the descent into violence. They explain that before the Civil Rights Era, the Irish Republican Army’s (IRA’s) violent border campaign had

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<sup>1</sup> Christopher Hewitt, “Explaining the Violence of Northern Ireland,” *The British Journal of Sociology*. 38, no. 1. (March 1987): 88, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/590581>.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 88-93.

<sup>3</sup> Denis O’Hearn, “Catholic Grievances: Comments.” *The British Journal of Sociology*. 38, no. 1. (March 1987): 94-100, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/stable/590582>.

<sup>4</sup> Kassian A. Kovalcheck, “Catholic Grievances in Northern Ireland: Appraisal and Judgment.” *The British Journal of Sociology*, 38, no. 1, (Mar., 1987): 77-87, accessed April 6, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/stable/590580>.

failed to gain support from the broader population. Furthermore, the Nationalist Party's attempts to elect members and pass reforms in parliament had been stopped by the loyalist-dominated government in Stormont, who practiced gerrymandering and voting discrimination to ensure their continued dominance. Following global trends, the Catholic minority organized a non-violent social movement for civil rights.<sup>5</sup> Thus, historians argue the Civil Rights Movement was "a new way of conceptualizing an old problem" for Ireland, not a disavowal of their bloody past.<sup>6</sup> Since the movement for many was based on convenience rather than conviction though, as time passed and civil rights activists faced setbacks, the population once again turned to violence to solve their problems.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, activists' efforts stirred up the entire population, providing more numbers and support for extremist groups on both sides. This mobilization occurred because, as historian Ó Dochartaigh argues, the people's emotional response abroad and at home to the evidence of discrimination made them unable to separate the civil rights' cause from the nationalists' cause.<sup>8</sup> The population could not overcome sectarian prejudices and fears, which the revealed injustices and apparent threats brought to the surface. Civil rights drew attention to the problem, showed no peaceful way of solving it, and incited many to violence.<sup>9</sup> Thus, historians argue the movement only served to further polarize the population into two extreme groups: the republicans, who were convinced that nothing but violence would change things, and the loyalists, who were convinced that the republicans were a dangerous threat.<sup>10</sup> This thesis draws out deeper complexities in this narrative, however, showing how the civil rights groups,

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<sup>5</sup> Richard English, "The Interplay of Non-Violent and Violent Action in Northern Ireland, 1967-72," in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, ed. Adam Robert and Timothy Garton Ash, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 82-3.

<sup>6</sup> Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland*, (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1990) 1.

<sup>7</sup> Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, 3; English, "Interplay of Non-Violent and Violent Action," 83.

<sup>8</sup> Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 56.

<sup>9</sup> Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites*, 10-2; English "Interplay of Non-Violent and Violent Action," 85.

<sup>10</sup> English, "Interplay of Non-Violent and Violent Action," 85.

specifically the PD, struggled to negotiate the changing mood of the people, fluctuating between embracing violence and distancing themselves from sectarianism.

Other scholars have complicated the concept of violence in Northern Ireland during the period and the causes behind the extreme polarization. Allen Feldman, for example, considers the role geographical space plays in provoking people to violent action, while Charles Townshend examines the Irish sense of a living history as it relates to their willingness to engage in violence.<sup>11</sup> Both of these scholars argue that deeply rooted tensions already existed in Northern Ireland, which civil rights events merely caused to resurface. This thesis elaborates on these historians' theories too, matching their ideas up directly with the PD's experience

Simon Prince and Stephen Beach have studied the PD specifically, describing its development, activities, and the way in which the events of 1969 altered its internal organization. They focus on the PD's shift to the left, when it drifted away from its original, moderate student base. Beach and Prince point to the internal structure of the group, the disagreements over ideology between their leaders and other civil rights activists, and unrelenting government oppression as the main contributing factors to its leftward shift.<sup>12</sup> This thesis seeks to add to this analysis, drawing out a connection between the PD members' ideological radicalization and their move toward violence.

Other historians focus on the violence of the Long March as one of the last major events of the Civil Rights Movement. They argue that this instance polarized the population by exposing the injustice of the state and policing system. In the case of Burntollet Bridge, the most

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<sup>11</sup> Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Charles Townshend, *Political Violence In Ireland*, (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1983).

<sup>12</sup> Stephen W. Beach, "Social Movement Radicalization: The Case of the People's Democracy in Northern Ireland," *The Sociological Quarterly*, 18, no. 3. (Summer 1977), 305-318, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4105836>; Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007) 194-211.

violent moment of the march, scholars, like Paul Dixon and Jim Smyth, emphasize the role of the media in capturing and disseminating images of loyalist violence against unarmed and docile students, while the police stood back and even supported the aggressors. These images moved the local population of Derry into immediate action and became a source of bitter memories, a sort of precursor to Bloody Sunday.<sup>13</sup> Thus, the marginal, rebellious students ended up making a greater impact than even they had predicted, because their demonstration showed the government's inability to restrain the violence of the loyalists.

Historians disagree on whether the PD members intentionally instigated the violent outbreak or were simply swept up in circumstances beyond their control, in which the tension between nationalist rebels and the loyalist police force snapped. Dixon stresses that the PD and the local civil rights organization, the Derry Citizens Action Committee (DCAC), lost control of the situation once they reached Derry.<sup>14</sup> Even Paul Kingsley, who writes from a blatantly loyalist perspective, acknowledges that the civil rights organizations did not predict or desire the violence that erupted. In his opinion, "mass movement" determined what happened that day, not individual organizations and their leaders.<sup>15</sup> Thus, historians caution that even when the minority nationalist sect resorted to violence after the Long March, the majority of PD and DCAC members did not necessarily intend the turn to violence. On the other hand, Ó Dochartaigh, who writes of the conflict from the perspective of Derry, claims that as events continued in the city, the DCAC became directly involved in organizing the defense of Free Derry.<sup>16</sup> He further argues that as both the DCAC and the PD became more radical, they co-organized demonstrations,

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<sup>13</sup> Jim Smyth, "Moving the Immovable: The Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland," in *Social Movements and Ireland*, ed. Linda Connolly and Niamh Hourigan, (New York: Manchester University Press, 2006), 106-23.

<sup>14</sup> Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 82.

<sup>15</sup> Paul Kingsley, *Londonderry Revisited: A Loyalist Analysis of the Civil Rights Controversy*, (Belfast: Belfast Publications, 1989), 198.

<sup>16</sup> Ó Dochartaigh, *Civil Rights to Armalites*, 40-1.

which they knew would turn into dangerous riots.<sup>17</sup> Kingsley too, while he seems to have mixed feelings about the PD specifically, implies in a general sense that the IRA manipulated those dedicated to the civil rights cause into starting the violent polarization, which they then took over.<sup>18</sup> This tension among historians over who started the violence goes back to the initial articles from the 1980s discussed above and runs as a thread through all the works on this period. While this thesis seeks to avoid assigning responsibility and blame, this debate is important because this thesis does argue that PD members struggled with the tension over violence and nationalist involvement in their evolution toward militant, social radicalism. The debate in the historiography about responsibility was also waged by critics in their own time, and it is something that the PD members confronted, both personally and as a group.

Thus, historians have examined the origins of violence in the Civil Rights Era. They have also examined the internal tensions within the PD itself as it struggled to evolve with the changing landscape of Northern Ireland's politics. To some extent, they have united these two discussions in a debate over whether the members of the PD were responsible for the violence that erupted during the Long March. However, they have neglected the importance of the PD's own ideology of violence and its process of ideological development. They have not examined the perspectives of the PD members to determine if the Irish sense of a present history justifying violence played a role in their development and so called maturation. They have not connected the PD's growing social radicalism to the history of socialism in Ireland or the PD's awareness of that history and its relation to violence. This thesis will seek to fill this gap and explicitly study the changing perceptions of sectarian violence within the PD.

This thesis also considers the written histories of the IRA, particularly historian Brian

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid, 51.

<sup>18</sup> Kingsley, *Londonderry Revisited*, 9-10.



Hanley and journalist Scott Millar's work on the Official IRA and their analysis of Cathal Goulding's socialist ideology.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, Ed Moloney's *A Secret History of the IRA* offers insight into the internal tensions within the organization leading to the formation of the Provisional IRA.<sup>20</sup> Both scholars and ex-IRA men who are now significant political leaders contest the views of these writers, yet this thesis draws on their work, backing up their points with primary sources where possible.

This thesis demonstrates the effect sectarian violence had on the development of the PD. Chapter one discusses the sectarian context in which the PD developed. The Irish people viewed themselves as distinctly divided in almost every area of life. The narrative of their history was one of conquerors and oppressors fighting rebels and thieves. The people on each side of the divide were taught by the older generations to view the conflict as deep and unforgivable. Each side, however, also dreamed of finally resolving the conflict. Their history suggested only two ways to do this: either through political action or through violent rebellion or suppression. Thus, within each polarized group there was significant internal debate. In the 1960s, however, a new strategy for ending the conflict emerged in the form of civil rights. Civil rights activists sought to transcend the sectarian divide and fight for the good of all those struggling in the economically and socially depressed country. However, even before the PD came onto the scene, the Civil Rights Movement was becoming mired in sectarianism. Activists reminded the people of their historical grievances. This led to escalating sectarian violence, which the civil rights activists struggled to control.

Chapter two describes the PD's emergence, tracking their development. It tells their history through their own words and perspective from their founding, through the Long March,

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<sup>19</sup> Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: the Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party*, (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002).

and into the following years. It focuses on their attitudes toward violence, demonstrating the changes that occurred. The members saw themselves maturing, changing from innocents to realists. They struggled to find the best way to create change, seeking to harness the people's violent tendencies and further the PD's cause. The other civil rights groups had struggled to keep their sectarian base under control, and so, when the PD pushed their strategies to the limit, they lost control. They could not even escape sectarian tendencies within their own group. They turned to violence and used their own loss of innocence and the sectarian view of history to rationalize their decisions and actions.

The third chapter discusses the PD's socialism. Following the violence of the Long March and their continuous experience with violence afterwards, the PD members became persuaded that violence might be an effective strategy. With their socialist ideology, however, they hoped to embrace violence without embracing sectarianism. They argued for a Workers' Republic, uniting the middle and lower classes. However, in attempting to implement this ideology, they again failed to rise above sectarianism. Unable to get their ideals across to their followers, they also failed to escape aligning themselves with republican organizations. Finally, they could not rise above sectarianism within their own leadership. The engrained, historical, and dichotomous conflict prevailed. The PD's push for civil rights and a socialist republic only resulted in a push toward the violent times of the Troubles.

## Chapter 1: Building Tension through the 1960s

In Ireland, religion, politics, and economics have long combined to create sharp divisions between the people. These divisions have led to a long history of turbulence and violence. Eddie McAteer, a leader of the Nationalist Party in the 1960s, said, “In other countries you have problems; one country has perhaps an ethnic problem, another country will have a religious problem, another a social problem- the haves and have-nots. But God help us, in the north of Ireland here we have the three rolled into one.”<sup>1</sup> In order to understand this complex and bloody history, scholars and the people of Ireland have set up clear constructs to define and interpret the past. These constructs offer various labels, which allow the people to set themselves and others into identifiable, opposing categories, each with their own interpretation of history. In this way, Northern Irish citizens use their neighbors’ religion, heritage, and place of residence to label and predict both their neighbors’ political identities and their views of the historical conflict. They also use these indicators to interpret their own place in the conflict as it has been constructed around them.

Thus, in Ireland, people are separated basically into two groups— Protestant unionists and Catholic nationalists. Traditionally, Protestant unionists identify with the Scottish and English colonizers of Ireland, especially in the northern counties of Ulster. They have lived in Ireland for so long— since the founding of the Ulster Plantation of the early 1600’s— that they see Ireland as home. However, they also feel connected to Britain and wish to remain English citizens, loyal to the crown and to their Protestant British roots. On the other side of the conflict, Catholic Nationalists traditionally see themselves as coming from the original natives of Ireland, a branch of Gaelic Celts, and from those of Anglo Irish descent, who assimilated to Gaelic lifestyles in the

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<sup>1</sup> Eddie McAteer, interview with W.H. Van Voris (Spring 1972), in *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary*, ed. W.H. Van Voris, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 12.

pre-Reformation Middle Ages. They see the British colonizers as invaders, who stole the land from them, the rightful owners. The Protestant English forced the Catholic Irish to live off the worst land, to occupy the lowest level jobs, and even to immigrate to the European continent and America. Nationalists throughout Ireland therefore have resented the suppression of their culture and of their Catholic faith throughout their history. Looking forward, they desire political and cultural freedom from the British and wish to form their own nation.<sup>2</sup>

After centuries of turmoil, the Anglo Irish Treaty, signed December 6, 1921, attempted but failed to solve this dispute. The treaty set up the Republic of Ireland as a free and independent state while Northern Ireland, made up mostly of the traditionally Protestant Ulster counties, remained a part of the United Kingdom. However, in order to make Northern Ireland viable as a state, additional areas had to be added and so many Catholic nationalists remained under British rule against their wishes. Meanwhile, the Ulster Protestant unionists continued to feel threatened by the Catholic population remaining even in what was ostensibly their own nine counties. Since this time then, the conflict has continued. From this point, nationalists sought an end to partition and a uniting of the whole island of Ireland while unionists sought to keep the partition and the Catholic minority from rebelling.<sup>3</sup>

The Irish people also developed labels to designate extremists and fanatics from moderates. Everyone could label himself or herself as either a nationalist or a unionist, but these extreme terms were reserved for those willing to take action. By the time of the Troubles, the term “republican” usually denoted an extreme nationalist while the term “loyalist” was reserved for the more extreme unionists. Extremists did not hold more radical views than the traditional

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<sup>2</sup> My reading of these labels is informed by many secondary sources, especially Cathal McCall, *Identity in Northern Ireland* (MacMillan Press: London, 1999); Charles Townshend, *Political Violence In Ireland* (Clarendon Press: Oxford, 1983); W.H. Van Voris, *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

positions. Indeed, the derivation of the labels shows they held similar goals to more moderate figures. Republicans supported a united Irish Republic while loyalists wished to remain loyal to the United Kingdom, just as their more moderate counterparts did. However, these people were seen as extreme because of their methods. They labeled themselves as a group less likely to seek compromise. In other words, the people considered republicans and loyalists as more willing to resort to violence to achieve their ideals. Therefore, the terms republican and loyalist were often associated with paramilitary groups while the terms nationalist and unionist were more associated with political parties. In politics, it was the Nationalist Party against the Ulster Unionist Party. In secret societies, the Irish Republican Army (IRA) fought against the Loyalist Orange Order.

This construction of labels, however, often broke down in practice. Those not directly involved in the conflict often used the terms interchangeably. When in doubt, many chose to name the two sides simply Protestant and Catholic, which come with their own problematic associations.<sup>4</sup> Also, each sub group and organization adopted varying terms and the terminology defining radicalism was fluid. For example, a Unionist politician running against a Nationalist candidate might try to label his or her opponent a Republican at heart.

Complicating the issue further were people whose ideas fell between the extremes. These people saw no hope of total success for either the nationalist or the unionist side and so pursued compromises and, in their eyes, more realistic ways to end the dispute. Many of those willing to compromise related to the nationalists in that they did not take pride in being under the yolk of the British and wished for their own cultural and national identity as Irish people. However, like the loyalists, they saw the practical advantages of being economically tied to the United

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<sup>4</sup> For example, see Paul Dixon, *Northern Ireland: The Politics of War and Peace*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), who uses the terms when referring to the population generally.

Kingdom and even the honor of being tied to the Queen. Throughout history then, many realists, falling under both the nationalist and unionist labels, have advocated for more temperate action. One famous representative of this group was Charles Parnell, an Anglican, nationalist politician who argued for Home Rule instead of total independence in the 1880s.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, it was this tradition of self-conscious realism that the Northern Irish state sought to appeal to in the 1920s with the Anglo Irish Treaty. However, these realists failed to resolve the conflict and create peace. They also failed to make a larger impact on the constructed, dichotomous narrative of history. Indeed, in spite of their moderate politics, contemporaries and historians still categorized them as either nationalists or unionists. Traditional Catholic nationalists saw no benefit in compromising their pure ideals of nationality, for which many martyrs had died. Traditional Protestant unionists feared compromise, thinking that giving any ground would only encourage more rebellion.

This then is the basic historical outline of the conflict, as the Irish people and historians perceived and constructed it. While there was a spectrum of opinions, it was a linear spectrum with just two views at each extreme: Catholic nationalism and Protestant unionism. There were also only two options for dealing with the conflict: violence by extremists or politics by compromising realists. In the late 1960s, however, international events inspired attempts to change the polarized system. These attempts developed into the Civil Rights Movement, which contemporaries perceived, at least in the beginning, as a fundamentally different strategy of conflict resolution and, indeed, a new way of seeing the conflict itself. Instead of there being Catholics against Protestants, civil rights activists hoped to unite the working class against the upper class political elites. Instead of resorting to violence or compromises, both of which were

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<sup>5</sup> Roy Foster, *Modern Ireland 1600-1972*, (London: Penguin Books, 1988), 400-428.

perceived as being innately unsavory, civil demonstrations offered a chance to provoke big changes with neither bloodshed nor dishonor. However, time revealed problems with the Civil Rights Movement as well. Meanwhile, extremists continued to threaten and work in society through both political and violent means.

In this chapter, I examine how the people of Northern Ireland worked within this construct of labels and narrated history and applied it to their struggles, surrounding the Civil Rights Movement and leading up to the development of the People's Democracy in 1968. First, I examine the Protestant unionist side. The Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) dominated the official government of Northern Ireland at Stormont. However, due to the pressure of the Civil Rights Movement, party leaders were evaluating ways to allow more openness in the political process. Meanwhile though, in a public backlash against these changes, the noted rhetorician Rev. Ian Paisley was sweeping the more extremist populist group, the Orange Order, into an increasingly anti-Catholic fury. Next, I look at the Catholic nationalist side. The conditions of Stormont made the Nationalist Party and legitimate politics largely nonexistent for this group. The Irish Republican Army (IRA) and its political branch Sinn Fein, however, were experiencing great internal change and beginning to reconsider their goals and methods during this period. The leaders were observing the success of the civil rights activists and seeking to both copy and capitalize on that success for their own sectarian cause. Throughout the chapter, I seek to examine how the civil rights groups sought to position themselves between the polarized sides, working not just between the extremes of ideology but also between the extremes of methods utilized by both sides. I conclude by describing the events of October 5<sup>th</sup>, the failed civil rights demonstration and quasi-nationalist demonstration, which led directly to the formation of the PD. Thus, this chapter sets the context for understanding the development of the PD. It also

demonstrates the way in which the threat of sectarian violence was already undermining the civil rights cause both externally and internally. Extremists from all sides were using the civil rights agitation to push their own agenda and the activists themselves struggled to withstand their persuasive pressures.

*Stormont Unionists and Orangemen Loyalists*

Since the 1921 Anglo Irish Treaty had set up the nine counties of Northern Ireland, the unionists had dominated politics. The treaty allowed the Northern Irish state to largely rule itself through an independent parliament at Stormont. Within this parliament, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) held a large majority and the Ulster Unionists implemented several strategies to ensure their continued authority.

First, and most relevant to the beginnings of the Civil Rights Movement, was a policy of discrimination against the Catholic minority. Stormont politicians had gerrymandered voting districts to create a unionist majority even in largely Catholic areas, most famously in the city of Derry. The Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ), an early, well-respected civil rights group, published research showing that in 1963, for example, 10,500 Unionist electors secured twelve seats while 19,500 Nationalists secured only eight seats on the Derry urban council.<sup>6</sup>

Government officials also controlled housing allotments and used this power to patronize their supporters. Since much of voting was restricted to property owners, the government used the housing situation to bolster further support in the polls. This affected the Catholic minority in more than just their right to vote, however, as many of them were forced to live in inadequate and overcrowded slums. For example, the CSJ recorded from another town in 1963 that “[s]ince 1948 Enniskillen Borough ha[d] built 177 houses in 4 housing estates and given only **TWO**

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<sup>6</sup> Campaign for Social Justice in Northern Ireland (CSJ), *Northern Ireland: The Plain Truth*, 1<sup>st</sup> edition, (Dungannon: CSJ, February 5, 1964), 5. CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/pdfs/csj179.pdf>.



houses to Nationalists.”<sup>7</sup> In addition to sanctioning discrimination, the Special Powers Act of 1922 gave parliament the right to pass legislation, which would allow unionists to exert physical force over revolutionary, or even mildly threatening, forces.<sup>8</sup> Through this Act, parliament justified the censorship of nationalist propaganda and the displaying of the tricolor flag, the establishment of the B-Specials, a volunteer police force of predominantly armed Protestants, and, eventually, the policies of internment.

The Orange Order, a more extremist and somewhat secretive club of Protestant loyalists, also fought to back up the unionists’ domination. These loyalists used their history to actively promote, through their rhetoric, an enduring “siege mentality,” meant to put all Protestants on the defensive. This siege mentality reached back to the plantation days, when wealthy English Protestants first began to fear that their rural, native, Irish neighbors would rebel in agrarian wars. When the Catholic agrarian masses literally besieged urban Protestant workers in the 1689 Siege of Derry, the Protestants felt this fear validated. The people fought over English succession lines with the Protestants defending William of Orange. Therefore, the very name of the Orange Order evoked a historical grudge. Furthermore, siege mentality promoted an unwillingness to compromise since, as historian Cathal McCall says, in a siege “to compromise would be to surrender.”<sup>9</sup> The fight for partition epitomized this unwillingness to compromise, as Lord Brookeborough, the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland in 1956 said, in “the motto that expresses so aptly the sentiment in the North– Not an Inch!”<sup>10</sup> Thus, siege mentality was a rhetorically constructed idea, which interpreted history to promote an extreme and inflexible

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Northern Ireland. Parliament. *Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland) 1922*, (Belfast: HMSO, April 7, 1922), CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmsso/spa1922.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> McCall, *Identity in Northern Ireland*, 23.

<sup>10</sup> Northern Ireland Government, *Why the Border Must Be: The Northern Ireland Case in Brief*, (Belfast: HMSO, 1956), CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/docs/nigov56.htm>.

viewpoint. Loyalist groups actively used this concept to rally more conservative Protestant unionists to their cause.

In the 1960s, this extreme position changed, especially for the UUP. As politicians, party members could sense the mood changing internationally, in England, and locally. International support of human rights, especially concerning minorities, was prevalent through almost every global media outlet, showing civil rights movements in the United States and France and discontent over the treatment of peoples in the occupied countries of Eastern Europe.<sup>11</sup> The famous March on Washington led by Martin Luther King in 1963 as well as the Selma-Montgomery march of 1966 were captured on television and disseminated all over the United Kingdom.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the United Kingdom's promotion of state led welfare and healthcare programs, which advertised help for all, regardless of race, religion, or socioeconomic status, as well as the rise to power of the Labour Party hinted at this fervor reaching Irish shores.

Soon, civil rights activists brought these issues to the forefront. Housewives in Dungannon deliberately recreated signs from Alabama to picket housing projects.<sup>13</sup> Other activists copied other aspects of US civil rights rhetoric. As African Americans had demanded their constitutional right to equal treatment, the Northern Irish stressed, through the media, the contradiction between asking Catholics to embrace British citizenship while denying them basic rights to the new reforms, especially ones related to housing.<sup>14</sup> They also cast themselves as a minority population being inexcusably mistreated. For example, one of the earliest civil rights publications to draw international attention, the CSJ's *The Plain Truth*, argues: "while Northern

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<sup>11</sup> Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 70-1.

<sup>12</sup> Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland*, (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1990), 217.

<sup>13</sup> Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68*, 70-1.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Dooley, *Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland & Black America*, (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1998); Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, 2.

Ireland has remained an integral part of the United Kingdom...the Catholic minority...has been denied rights you accept as a matter of course in Britain.”<sup>15</sup> This rhetoric was radically different from previous approaches. It implicitly acknowledged British rights to rule Ulster, yet simultaneously undermined the rule of Stormont. Soon then, civil rights activists were revealing the effects of discrimination and getting international and certainly British attention. In response, politicians at Stormont began to change their policies.

In 1963, Terrence O’Neill’s election as prime minister representing the UUP showed an acknowledgement of the need to change. Historian Paul Dixon writes that his election “led to a modernization of at least the rhetoric of unionism if not the substance.”<sup>16</sup> O’Neill, like the civil rights activists, was caught up in the international changes of his day. To some extent, he embraced the ideas of the British welfare system and the politics of the Labour Party. He wanted Northern Ireland to catch up, economically speaking, to the modern era. Britain seemed to be thriving after World War Two, while key industries were leaving Northern Ireland. The main industry of Belfast, shipbuilding, was certainly on the decline after the war with increased international competition and lowered demand. The other main industry, linen manufacturing, was struggling as synthetics replaced traditional fabrics.<sup>17</sup> O’Neill clearly saw the need to end sectarian fighting in order to convince new industries from Britain and the United State to invest in Northern Ireland. In one speech, he indirectly, but scathingly referenced the problems of discrimination, claiming, “We want to marry housing development and industrial development so that we no longer have the absurd situation that, in an area of high unemployment, firms are

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<sup>15</sup> CSJ, *The Plain Truth*, 2.

<sup>16</sup> Dixon, *Politics of War and Peace*. 63.

<sup>17</sup> Van Voris. *Violence in Ulster*, 35.

frantically searching for the workpeople they need.”<sup>18</sup> O’Neill feared how discrimination would appear to the Labour Party of Westminster. He tried to combat that negative image with speeches focused on the economic problems, yet optimistic.<sup>19</sup>

O’Neill feared not only that the Labour Party MPs would see Northern Ireland as failing to align with their high ideals of equality, but also, as a financial burden. Westminster received all the taxes raised for welfare programs and then redistributed the funds throughout the United Kingdom. Thus, while Stormont was responsible for implementing the welfare programs and services, Westminster politicians were aware of the larger numbers. Since Northern Ireland was struggling so much more than other areas, it was receiving far more money from the welfare pool than it contributed.<sup>20</sup> The Labour politicians also resented that the right winged Stormont politicians responded slowly and grudgingly when implementing the required social reforms that the money was intended for in the first place. Civil rights activists had pointed this out from the beginning and kept repeating it. At the end of many CSJ pamphlets there is written in bold:

The British Taxpayer keeps the Northern Ireland State in existence with an annual grant of over 46 million pounds. Since you are one of these taxpayers and have shown so often how much you cherish freedom, please ask your Member of Parliament if he is satisfied with this state of affairs in Northern Ireland.<sup>21</sup>

O’Neill responded to this attack with many new programs to promote businesses in Northern Ireland, which would create more jobs and taxable income. However, many of O’Neill’s economic schemes cost even more for the Westminster government to start up. Therefore, he was, in effect, gambling his political career on the idea that effective change would occur and the government’s investment would meet with returns. This then was a great departure from the

<sup>18</sup> Terence O’Neill, speech given in Belfast (May 22, 1965), in *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary*, ed. W.H. Van Voris, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 36.

<sup>19</sup> Dixon, *Politics of War and Peace*, 63.

<sup>20</sup> Van Voris, *Violence in Ulster*, 35.

<sup>21</sup> CSJ, *The Plain Truth*, 2; similar quote in Campaign for Social Justice in Northern Ireland (CSJ). *Londonderry: One Man, No Vote*, (Dungannon: CSJ, February 19, 1965), 7. CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/pdfs/csj84.pdf>.

traditional acceptance of a terminally divided society. Driven by civil rights activists, unionist rhetoric was changing to reflect a new perception of the conflict as economically driven and, ultimately, surmountable.

In the end, however, O'Neill's policies failed. Many thought then and now that he was better at giving speeches than at implementing actual policy. He could not overcome sectarianism and he was largely unable to convince the Catholics that he had their best interest at heart. Nationalists began to criticize him as "cosmetic, patronizing, and at times insulting."<sup>22</sup> Labeled a unionist himself, he could not convince others that he saw the Catholic minority as anything more than their nationalist label. Indeed he struggled to overcome Catholic stereotypes even within his own understanding. In one speech he complained:

It is frightfully hard to explain to Protestants that if you give Roman Catholics a good job and a good house they will live like Protestants because they will see neighbours with cars and television sets; they will refuse to have eighteen children. But if a Roman Catholic is jobless, and lives in the most ghastly hovel, he will rear eighteen children on National Assistance. If you treat Roman Catholics with due consideration and kindness, they will live like Protestants in spite of the authoritative nature of their Church ...<sup>23</sup>

While he meant to criticize the Protestants' belligerence, nationalists quickly used this bigoted quote to completely discredit O'Neill. He was also unable to overcome siege mentality and the Protestants' fear of compromise. At first, Protestant unionists supported the changes. With many of them struggling financially, they especially saw the need to attract new industries. However, when they began to believe that the Catholics might benefit more than themselves and when Catholics seemed emboldened by their success, O'Neill lost control and the Orange Order extremists took over Protestant public opinion. The old rhetoric returned through Rev. Ian Paisley, a Protestant preacher who was infamously stubborn and staunchly anti-Catholic. He

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<sup>22</sup> Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 53.

<sup>23</sup> Terence O'Neill, *Belfast Telegraph*, May 10, 1969.

played on Protestant fears and the idea that any compromise meant encouraging full on rebellion and violent consequences. In speeches to loyalists he repeated the phrase “never surrender” to hearken back to siege mentality.<sup>24</sup> He even took his speeches one step further when, as a Protestant pastor, he warned against the moral and even apocalyptic consequences of allowing Catholics power. He accused O’Neill of “sell[ing] out the great tradition of unionism” by “sacrificing...principles” and “the doctrines of Protestantism.”<sup>25</sup> He thought Stormont leadership lacked both “moral fiber” and “moral courage.”<sup>26</sup> The threat of Paisleyism also led the Catholic population to view O’Neill’s offers of compromise as concessions to loyalist extremist and further undermined their trust in him.<sup>27</sup>

Education policies provide a good example of this reactionary situation. The 1947 Education Act in Northern Ireland copied the 1944 Butler Act of England and set up an education system based on merit instead of class. Children were tested at age eleven and set on a career trajectory depending on the results. By the 1960s, any child who tested well could eventually go to university on government grants. Furthermore, O’Neill led Stormont to pass the Education (Northern Ireland) Act of 1968, which increased funding for voluntary schools (Catholic schools) from 65 to 80 percent.<sup>28</sup> Many Catholic families attempted to take full advantage of these reforms, seeing them as a way to escape the cycle of poverty and achieve powerful, professional careers. Kevin Boyle, a Queen’s University professor, discussed how this emotion played out in his family. He claimed that his mother, like many other Catholic women,

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<sup>24</sup> One example from Ian Paisley, speech to unionists from Victoria Park in Belfast (September 6, 1971), *The First Post*, (London: Dennis Publishing, 2009), accessed April 15, 2011, <http://www.thefirstpost.co.uk/video/film,1094,ian-paisley-well-never-surrender>.

<sup>25</sup> Ian Paisley, speech at Queen’s University, Belfast, (May 5, 1972), in *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary*, ed. W.H. Van Voris, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 44.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

<sup>27</sup> Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, 33-34.

<sup>28</sup> Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), *Northern Ireland Fact and Falsehood: A Frank Look at the Present and the Past*, (Belfast: UUP, n.d. 1968?), section 11, no pagination, CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/docs/uup/uup68.htm>.

stressed education to her children, including taking advantage of the reforms, and thus overcoming the “Evil of the Three S’s- that the [education] system was segregated, sectarian and selective.”<sup>29</sup> By the late 1960s, the results were becoming apparent with many white-collar jobs going to the more qualified Catholic applicants, empowering their minority communities. For example, mainly Catholic middle class professionals led the Campaign for Social Justice, one of the first civil rights groups in Northern Ireland.<sup>30</sup> Meanwhile, Protestants who had previously relied on discriminatory hiring practices to maintain their blue collar, but very stable jobs in the ship building industry, were facing lay offs as the industry itself began to fail.<sup>31</sup> Thus, the old Protestant fears seemed to be coming true. They had given the Catholics some help in their education and now Catholics were stealing their jobs and becoming their bosses. While this was a generalization, and possibly a distortion, of the situation, it was also how many perceived education at the time.

In this context, O’Neill created controversy by becoming the first unionist prime minister to visit a Catholic school in 1964. He was seen on television discussing elementary education with the nuns.<sup>32</sup> Though attempting to pacify civil rights activists, his actions only served to incite the loyalists’ disdain. Paisley especially condemned him harshly. In a speech given a few years later at Queens, he raised the still segregated community schools to provoke laughter at O’Neill’s failure.<sup>33</sup> The Catholic minority were also let down when, in 1968, a second university was founded in Coleraine instead of Catholic Derry, which had lobbied hard for it.<sup>34</sup> Insult was

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<sup>29</sup> Kevin Boyle, interview with W.H. Van Voris, (Winter 1972), in *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary*, ed. W.H. Van Voris, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 30.

<sup>30</sup> Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68*. 75.

<sup>31</sup> Van Voris. *Violence in Ulster*. 35.

<sup>32</sup> “History in Northern Ireland,” *Northern Ireland Education System*, CAIN, accessed April 15, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/educ/eductime.htm>.

<sup>33</sup> Paisley, speech at Queen’s, 43-44.

<sup>34</sup> McCall, *Identity in Northern Ireland*, 40.

added to injury when the government named the college the University of Ulster, a term clearly associated with the unionist cause.

Education is just one example of sectarianism overcoming O'Neill's reforms. While at first his reforms, influenced by the Civil Rights Movement, seemed to promote a unified community based on economic and cultural growth, loyalist extremists quickly began to pressure him into moderation. This moderation then led the Catholic population to distrust him and to raise their own extremist complaints. Amidst this tension, O'Neill himself repeatedly made statements that revealed his own biasness against Catholics. Thus, by the fall of 1968, O'Neill was set up to fall, condemned by both sides. The PD would play an instrumental role in his final discrediting.

#### *Catholic Nationalists and the IRA*

By the 1960s, most nationalists had given up on achieving change through politics. The UUP's majority was overwhelming. Gerrymandering and voting restrictions, which made eligibility dependent on housing allotments, made it almost impossible for a nationalist candidate to get elected. Furthermore, the ineffectual Nationalist Party struggled to maintain membership even among those loyal to its cause. This was partly because many nationalists refused to participate in Stormont politics at all, since to do so would require them to recognize the legitimacy of the Anglo Irish treaty and the reality of partition.<sup>35</sup> In 1964, Gerry Fitt and Harry Diamond founded the Republican Labour Party as a mildly socialist option. However, these two men were their sole successfully elected MPs. By 1973, the party had disbanded.<sup>36</sup>

Amidst this sparseness of legitimate political activity, the IRA was also struggling. By 1962, the border campaign, in which guerrilla forces in the Republic of Ireland targeted sites

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<sup>35</sup> Moloney, *Secret History of the IRA*, 56.

<sup>36</sup> Gerry Fitt went on to form the modern day Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP).



along the Northern Irish border to create aggravation and build popular support for the border's dissolution, had completely failed.<sup>37</sup> Internal politics in the organization were also growing tense as Cathal Goulding led its members toward leftwing, socialist ideals. While the IRA would not officially divide to create the Provisional IRA until January 1970, the fissures were already deepening. Goulding encouraged compromising within the legitimate political system. He wished the IRA to embrace a gradualist approach to change through reform.<sup>38</sup> Meanwhile, hard liners were worried about defense after the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), a loyalist paramilitary group, led a string of Catholic assassinations in 1966.<sup>39</sup> These men saw Goulding as a weak leader, distracted by politics and ideals when he should be protecting nationalists on the streets. Historians and reminiscing nationalists refer to these men, who would later form the Provisional IRA, as realists, yet not in the tradition of the self-conscious realists who advocated for compromise between the sects.<sup>40</sup> Rather these men were realists who embraced violence as the only way to protect their homes. They did not see any realistic way to live at peace with the unionists and therefore saw rebellion as the only practical solution. The early stages of their development then illustrate how deepening sectarianism was already shifting the population toward violence.

In the early 1960s however, Cathal Goulding and his plans of gradual reform dominated the IRA. Under his influence, Sinn Fein, a radical yet more public organization of republicans, attempted to enter legitimate politics. The organization formed Republican Clubs to recruit and

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<sup>37</sup> Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: the Story of the Official IRA and the Workers' Party*. (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2009), 22.

<sup>38</sup> Moloney, *Secret History of the IRA*, 54.

<sup>39</sup> Gerry Adams, "A Republican in the Civil Rights Campaign," in *Twenty Years On*, ed. Michael Farrell, (Kerry: Brandon Book Publishers, 1988) 49-50.

<sup>40</sup> This description of the leaders of the first Provisional IRA is supported by Moloney, *Secret History of the IRA* 74-92; and Adams, "Republican in the Civil Rights Campaign," 39-53.

educate new, more temperate members.<sup>41</sup> A section of republicans still discouraged any association with politics and saw Sinn Fein as merely a distraction from the real fight, so recruitment was difficult. The government at Stormont also distrusted these radical groups and their Sinn Fein backers. Republicans gathering to talk about their grievances seemed to the unionists like it could only lead to trouble. Therefore, in March 1967, Republican Clubs were outlawed as subversive. The action backfired; however, as outraged nationalists saw themselves denied the right to assemble and united to support the previously unpopular clubs.<sup>42</sup> For many Catholics, the protests against the ban were the first civil demonstrations they witnessed firsthand. For example, student leaders quickly organized protests against the disbanding of the Queen's University Republican Club and these events showed them the potential power of students to organize and resist.<sup>43</sup> Many remembered this experience when planning their march to protest the violence of October 5<sup>th</sup>, which resulted in the formation of the PD. Despite the protests though, Republican Clubs remained illegal.

Amidst these frustrating setbacks, many in the Catholic minority began to choose civil resistance over the more traditional political or violent form. Historian Richard English describes why the concept of civil resistance appealed to even moderate nationalists as a way to open up the system.<sup>44</sup> Excluded from politics both through voting discrimination and the banning of Republican Clubs, nationalists saw the civil rights method as a chance to bring politics to the streets. Many of the early civil rights activists were from the rising middle class and saw themselves as educated professionals trying to reason with elite politicians. Excluded from

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<sup>41</sup> Hanley, *Lost Revolution*, 74.

<sup>42</sup> Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*. 135.

<sup>43</sup> Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68*, 194-5.

<sup>44</sup> Richard English, "The Interplay of Non-Violent and Violent Action in Northern Ireland, 1967-72," in *Civil Resistance and Power Politics: The Experience of Non Violent Action from Gandhi to the Present*, ed. Adam Robert and Timothy Garton Ash, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 82-3.

voting, they applied their skills to studying discrimination and organizing protests in order to get their message across. While they acknowledged that most victims of discrimination were from the Catholic minority, they sought to avoid being labeled nationalists.<sup>45</sup>

However, the civil rights leaders could not keep sectarianism out of their midst. Not only were most of their grievances against unionist policies, but also many of their members allied themselves directly with the nationalists. Those from a republican, extremist background saw the IRA's militant attempts falling apart and, therefore, perceived a need to attack unionists from a different position.<sup>46</sup> Seeing media images from civil rights campaigns abroad inspired them to claim discrimination as a new way of criticizing the unionist regime. For many IRA families, civil rights was a way to bring the fight from the shadows into the public sphere and to earn sympathy as victims instead of censure as terrorists. Historian Paul Kingsley, writing from a self-proclaimed loyalist perspective, goes so far as to say that the Civil Rights Movement was an intentional conspiracy to lead into the Troubles.<sup>47</sup> While other historians, notably Bob Purdie, vehemently deny this, no one denies that there were some in the movement who saw it practically benefitting the IRA's goal of forming a free nation by discrediting imperialism.<sup>48</sup> Thus, sectarianism was eroding the civil rights cause from within through activists who sought to champion both the civil rights and the nationalist cause at once.

Examining the formation of the comprehensive Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in January 1967 illustrates how the participation of activists with nationalist goals affected the movement as a whole. NICRA was formed to merge the various local civil rights groups into a more powerful, unified organization. Kingsley alludes to the Wolfe Tone Society

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<sup>45</sup> This interpretation is informed by Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68*, 74-9.

<sup>46</sup> English, "Interplay of Non-Violent and Violent Action," 82-3.

<sup>47</sup> Paul Kingsley, *Londonderry Revisited: A Loyalist Analysis of the Civil Rights Controversy* (Belfast: Belfast Publications, 1989), 129-30.

<sup>48</sup> Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*. 1-3.

as an IRA front, used to commandeer the movement through its involvement in this event.<sup>49</sup>

Gerry Adams, a prominent republican both then and now, whom Kingsley quotes out of context, attempted to minimize this involvement in his writings in 1980.<sup>50</sup> Adams does admit that the Wolfe Tone Society basically hosted the meeting called to establish NICRA, but describes the society as merely a combination of “republican oriented discussion groups.”<sup>51</sup> He carefully removes any mention of their (or his) association with the IRA. Also, he emphasizes that at the actual meeting, republican representatives consciously acted “on instructions not to pack the executive.”<sup>52</sup> Instead, they let other parties, notably Communists, take many of the leadership roles in NICRA. In fact, he claims, “the republican voting strategy ensured a nicely rounded leadership.”<sup>53</sup> Despite these minimizations, however, Adams’s confidence in republican control over the meeting is a little disconcerting as is his vagueness over who was giving republicans their orders. Therefore, regardless of the IRA’s actual involvement in the beginning of civil rights, it is clear that nationalists at least were deeply involved in directing the movement. However, other aspects of the meeting show the civil rights activists intentionally avoiding adopting nationalist goals. Their elected leaders were a very diverse group. Furthermore, the five goals of the new organization, which were “to defend the basic freedoms of all citizens, to protect the rights of the individual, to highlight all possible abuses of power, to demand guarantees for freedom of speech, assembly, and association, and to inform the public of their lawful rights,” emphasize the legitimacy of British law.<sup>54</sup> Civil rights employed a new rhetoric of

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<sup>49</sup> Kingsley, *Londonderry Revisited*, 129-30. Also, Wolfe Tone Societies described in Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, 123, as an intellectual, extreme Republican club.

<sup>50</sup> Adams, “Republican in the Civil Rights Campaign.” 42-4.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* 42.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* 43.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), “*We Shall Overcome...* ”: *The History of the Struggle for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland 1968-1978*. (Belfast: NICRA, 1978), section “Even Unionists Attended” chapter “Origins,” no pagination, CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/nicra/nicra78.htm>

discrimination and equality rather than the old one of suppression and conquering. The movement hinged on accepting British rule and arguing people's rights as full British citizens. It also shunned the intransigent violence of republican tradition.

Thus, while for unionists, civil rights forced the adoption of a new rhetoric, for many nationalists, civil rights was itself a new type of rhetoric. It was "a new way of conceptualizing an old problem."<sup>55</sup> However, civil resistance also created internal tensions since it forced the nationalists to reevaluate their traditional rhetoric. Civil rights only worked if activists implicitly accepted partition and the established government. In order to demand the right to vote, they had to accept the elected government as legitimate. In order to demand better housing, they had to argue as victimized British citizens. This acceptance, however, went against the history of nationalist denial. Furthermore, the Catholic minority could only portray themselves as guiltless victims as long as they did not fight back. They had to face persecution so that they could then expose its injustice. However, some wondered how much grief they could endure before responding with violence. Others thought the point justifying violence had been passed long ago. As the movement gained in strength, therefore, it undermined its own premise. The more discrimination was revealed and acknowledged, the more nationalists were convinced they needed much more than civil rights. They could not let go of their sectarian grievances and the nationalist streak in their midst took on an increasingly prominent role.

#### October 5<sup>th</sup>, 1968

The tense situation reached a crisis point on October 5, 1968. The Derry March was first conceived by NICRA as a follow up to their August demonstration in Dungannon, which had drawn two thousand marchers in peaceful, civil demonstration. However, the march was banned and locals feared violence, so it actually became a relatively small march led by local radicals

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<sup>55</sup> Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, 1.

apart from the dominant civil rights groups. The marchers confronted roadblocks set up by the RUC on Duke Street, however, and without reasonable provocation the police led a baton charge into the marchers. Television and news reporters immediately captured and spread images of this injustice, and this event quickly became the most significant, publicized civil rights demonstration up to that point. Rumors spread across the city of the violence, especially that a young girl had been killed by police brutality.<sup>56</sup> As a result, sectarian riots broke out all over the city, causing chaos to reign for the next three days. The incident reveals how the civil rights cause became enmeshed in the struggle between nationalists and unionists. Although the leaders sought to avoid picking sides, they failed both to be viewed as non-sectarian and to have an effect that transcended sectarianism. Thus, sectarian violence overcame their efforts even at this early stage and set the tone for the PD's development.

As stated, the Derry March was initially meant to be much larger. All of the civil rights associations of Derry had planned to be involved. However, when William Craig, the Home Affairs Minister at Stormont, banned the march, internal disputes divided the organizers. Two young and local radicals, Eamonn McCann and Eamonn Melaugh effectively took over the march. The more veteran activists joined only reluctantly, since they were powerless to stop them.

McCann and Melaugh made many changes to the activists' strategy for the march. They spent much of their efforts bringing in news media and press, talking to journalists, and making sure television cameras were set up along the route. To recruit marchers, they blanketed the city at night with flyers hoping to attract local residents of both sects, if not to participate at least to pay attention. Concerning this hope, McCann writes, "None of the placards demanded 'civil

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<sup>56</sup> Niall Ó Dochartaigh. *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles*, (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 20. The rumor was false.

rights.’ We were anxious to assert socialist ideas, whether or not the CRA approved. We used slogans such as ‘Class war, not Creed war’, ‘Orange and Green Tories Out’, ‘Working Class Unite and Fight!’<sup>57</sup> Thus, they attempted to expand beyond civil rights goals and to use socialist ideas to unite the people. This was a strategy that PD members would first skirt around and then embrace a few years later with McCann, so its use this early on is significant. However, McCann says of this strategy,

The intention was to draw a clear line between ourselves and the Nationalist Party, to prevent pan-Catholic unity. We understood in general terms that the Nationalist Party, if we did not clearly differentiate ourselves from it, might be able to assume control of whatever movement arose out of 5 October, and no movement with the Nationalist Party at or near its head could hope ever to cross the sectarian divide.<sup>58</sup>

As the civil rights activists before had relied on their role as British citizens to avoid nationalist arguments taking over, McCann and Melaugh relied on socialism to help them emphasize class over religious differences. Thus, McCann shows an awareness of the nationalist influence on the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. He was clearly aware of a struggle between nationalist and civil rights activists for “control.” Two Nationalist MPs did attend the march. However, overall the Derry March succeeded in forwarding civil rights over violent republican tradition. It showed the effectiveness of mass, nonviolent demonstrations for producing greater change than the slow, political process and short-lived, violent rebellions. Perhaps because of its impact for civil rights, other than McCann’s mentioning of these fliers in 1974, few scholars writing about the day mention that the march was advertized as a socialist demonstration. Most see it as a civil rights protest only. After the march, even McCann largely forgot these socialist ideals. He comments that in the immediate wake of such success and attention the civil rights organizations

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<sup>57</sup> Eamonn McCann, *War on an Irish Town*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (original 1974), (Penguin Books Limited: London 1993), chapter 4, no pagination, CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/mccann93.htm>

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

in Derry faced “political and organizational chaos.”<sup>59</sup> The thought at the time was “we had... made Derry world news. Who needed organization? Who needed theory?”<sup>60</sup> McCann would come to regret this after his experience with the PD though, as his often-embittered memoir shows.

There is much debate over how many people actually attended the Derry March. McCann and Melaugh both say that around four hundred came at the beginning, with one hundred being students.<sup>61</sup> It was certainly smaller than the Derry activists had originally intended. McCann writes in explanation:

It was a very disappointing crowd. People may have been deterred not by the ban but by the expectation of violence. And our somewhat melodramatic advance publicity had probably done little to reassure them. The march would proceed. We had said. ‘come hell or high water’, and the overwhelming majority of people in the Bogside and Creggan were not yet ready for either.<sup>62</sup>

McCann’s excerpt is revealing for the view of violence it portrays at the time. At this point, the people still appeared to shy away from violence but his suggestive use of “not yet ready” implies that this would change. In fact, his book continues the narrative to show the Derry population soon engaging willingly in violence. The quote also suggests that the leaders wanted to encourage standing up to violence. In another paragraph, McCann suggests he and Melaugh even provoked Minister Craig into banning the march to create more controversy. It was their plan to provoke the police to violence in front of the cameras. However, the marchers had not thought through their strategy fully. McCann records the shock many felt following the march:

By the next morning, after the television newsreels and the newspaper pictures, a howl of elemental rage was unleashed across Northern Ireland, and it was clear that things were never going to be the same again. We had indeed set out to make the police over-

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.



react. But we hadn't expected the animal brutality of the RUC.<sup>63</sup>

The police had blockaded the marchers in and, without provocation, sought to disband them with water cannons and clubs, injuring many people, including the two nationalist MPs who were present. Furthermore, riots and skirmishes broke out all over the city in response. Historian Bob Purdie states, "The events of 5 October traumatised the city as a whole and the rioting which followed showed that there was serious danger of a major sectarian conflict."<sup>64</sup>

The Westminster government issued the Cameron Report after an investigation of the events of the Civil Rights Movement. Its contents sought to explain the police overreaction in Derry. First, it argues,

The proposal to follow this route was designed to symbolise the claim of the Civil Rights Association to be non-sectarian, and neither Unionist nor Nationalist. However, the local Unionist headquarters objected to the march as offensive to a great majority of the citizens residing on the route, and also to any meeting near the War Memorial or any place closely associated with the siege of Londonderry.<sup>65</sup>

In other words, while the civil rights activists sought to free themselves from sectarian divisions their choice of route only provoked the unionists more. McCann claims geography also affected the nationalists' view of the march since "the whole route of our march lay outside the Catholic ghetto."<sup>66</sup> He writes, "We were to learn in time that when organizing a march towards confrontation it is essential to begin in 'home' territory and march out, so that there is somewhere for people to stream back to if this proves necessary."<sup>67</sup> Not only does this show an increasing concern for safety and defense, but also the fact that civil rights marchers saw Catholic areas as "home" indirectly admits that many of the marchers were nationalists. The

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, 189.

<sup>65</sup> Great Britain Parliament. *Disturbances in Northern Ireland (Cameron Report)*, Cmd 532, (Belfast: HMSO, 1969), section 4.40, CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/hmsocameron.htm>.

<sup>66</sup> McCann, *War on an Irish Town*, chapter 4.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

Cameron Report takes an even more extreme view of the situation arguing that “the local police, we think reasonably, regarded the arrangements for the Civil Rights march as being effectively in the hands of a small group of left wing and Republican extremists in Londonderry.”<sup>68</sup> The government investigators saw this whole march then as a sectarian plot. However, they did not extend this judgment to the civil rights leaders as a whole. They say of the police, “Rather less reasonably they equated the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association with a largely ‘Nationalistic’ movement.”<sup>69</sup> Thus, the Cameron Report acknowledges that the October 5<sup>th</sup> march had been taken out of the hands of the veteran civil rights activists. It condemns leaders like McCann and Melaugh, however, calling them radical Republicans. Since these men would become the new leaders of the movement with the PD, this judgment so early on in the Report forebodes the growing influence of sectarianism in civil rights activists’ decisions.

The events and surrounding debate over the Derry March reveal three main points then about the interaction of the Civil Rights Movement and sectarianism following October 5, 1968. First, the leaders of the movement were faltering in their control due to the pressures of nationalism and internal squabbles over their success. A more radical, left leaning leadership was developing out of Queen’s University campus which would push the movement into aggressive and dangerous mass demonstrations. Second, the strategy of the civil rights leaders was also changing. This march showed the beginning of an embrace of socialist theory as a means of transcending sectarianism and uniting the people. The march also showed the potential power of revealing police brutality to undermine the discriminatory, imperialist state and nonviolent marches as a way to provoke this example. Lastly, these events showed that the Civil Rights Movement was already struggling to overcome sectarianism. The riots that followed October 5<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Great Britain. Parliament. *Cameron Report*, section 4.42

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

in Derry showed the dangers of sectarian violence and how bringing these issues of discrimination out into the open could quickly result in the total loss of control of the situation by its leaders. The PD formed as a “violent reaction of feeling” to these events.<sup>70</sup> Their development would follow this same pattern, though, and dissolve into sectarian violence.

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<sup>70</sup> Ibid. section 4.55.

## Chapter 2: PD Portrayals of Violence

At the end of 1968 in Northern Ireland, violence was a fluid concept. Civil rights activists were challenging the established and exclusive divide between nationalists and unionists and between politics and violence. However, they were also struggling to overcome deeply ingrained sectarian biases in the Irish masses and in themselves. This chapter analyzes the formation and development of the People's Democracy (PD) in this context. Students formed the PD in reaction to the violence of October 5<sup>th</sup>. Self described as innocents, they portrayed themselves as caught up in the idea that they could change the world through civil resistance. The Long March, one of the bloodiest civil rights demonstrations of the era, altered their thinking. The PD members, who looked back on this event as a turning point, allowed it to define them as a group. Afterwards, they started to advocate for violence as an effective source of change. To justify their changed perceptions, they rationalized that violence was ingrained in the people and in their culture. They returned to the old rhetoric of historical division and insurmountable grievances. They concluded that the strategy of violence was a proven method throughout Ireland's history and was now naturally resurfacing.

### Formation: October to December, 1968

The October 5, 1968 civil rights demonstration ended in sectarian riots and violence, yet it drew positive attention to the nonpartisan movement as a whole. As a result, the students of Queens University, Belfast organized their own civil rights march four days later. Bernadette Devlin, a student present at both demonstrations, described the prevailing feelings of fervor and purpose among the students. She said, "I'll never forget the atmosphere...The very air seemed to crackle with emotional electricity. We all had a tremendous feeling of being *alive*, of finally

taking a stand for something important, and to hell with the consequences.”<sup>1</sup> The official proclamation for the march stated, “The eyes of the world are on Belfast today... We the students of Queen’s University, Belfast condemn extremism, believe in man’s basic civil and religious liberty, support the true ideals of civil rights, and demand that the government of this country strive harder for increased peace and harmony in our community.”<sup>2</sup> Thus, the students, influenced by the larger international movement for peace and local civil rights rhetoric, appealed to broader principles of human dignity. Their strong, purposeful language reveals their belief in their own ability to make a difference in the world. They maintained faith in the government as an institution responsive to public need and capable of reform.

Despite the loftiness of this statement, the leaders of the march also saw a practical side to the marchers’ strategy of nonviolence. A note passed among the participants cautioned, “in the event of any confrontation, the leading rows should sit down with their backs to the opposition. This tactic should be adopted by all marchers. Any running or retaliation is an invitation to be chased and beaten.”<sup>3</sup> Some of the students had witnessed first hand the danger of violence breaking out during civil demonstrations, in Derry on October 5<sup>th</sup> and, to a lesser degree, during student protests of the Republican Club ban. Queen’s faculty and leaders were concerned for the safety of the young, inexperienced, and potentially reckless participants, especially since they felt liable for the student group. When the students did face provocation by loyalist counter demonstrators and were told to halt by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), however, they sat down peacefully. The march eventually ended with the students proud, but frustrated with

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<sup>1</sup> Bernadette Devlin, “Playboy Interview with Bernadette Devlin,” *Playboy Magazine* XIX, September, 1972, 67ff., in *Bigotry and Blood: Documents on the Ulster Troubles*, ed. Charles Carlton (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977), 101.

<sup>2</sup> Action Committee for Peaceful Protest (ACPP), Queen's University Belfast, *Do not Risk Violence ... Think carefully about whether you should take part in today's protest march ...* (Belfast: ACPP, QUB, October 16, 1968), 1, CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/acpp\\_leaflet\\_091068r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/acpp_leaflet_091068r.pdf).

<sup>3</sup> People's Democracy (PD), *Civil Rights March: Details of Route from Queen's University, Belfast to Belfast City Hall*, (Belfast: PD, October 16, 1968), CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/PD\\_QUB\\_68b\\_100r.jpg](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/PD_QUB_68b_100r.jpg).

resistance and the slowness of change.

Later that night, the students came together and formally organized the People's Democracy. As with the march, they showed an ambitious confidence in asking for reform, yet a cautious restraint in their methods. They self-consciously attempted to preserve their innocence through the open structure of their group. They refused to instate any form of formal membership. Only those present at meetings could have a say in decisions, but anyone present could vote or ask to speak. They also elected a "Faceless Committee" to lead them. This group had no "executive power" but was only intended to organize and officiate at the meetings. The ten elected were political unknowns, mainly moderates with no former political ties.<sup>4</sup> Kevin Boyle, the group's young faculty sponsor and Faceless Committee member, said of that time, "we saw ourselves standing in between the innocents— we were three parts innocent ourselves—and the politicians."<sup>5</sup> Thus, the group, from its inception, tried to distance itself from choosing sides in the political divide. They wished to be labeled "innocents," free from the labels nationalist, unionist, and, especially, realist. Boyle further commented that they "certainly had no commitment to the past."<sup>6</sup> The past for Boyle was the Irish history of violent sectarianism and the PD wanted no part in it.

The group also voted on six tenets for which they would fight. These were mostly copied from other civil rights organizations, yet their wording shows the PD's moderate stance. For example, the last tenet asked for the repeal of the Special Powers Act. This act was highly controversial since it gave Stormont great powers to suppress rebellion and, thus, the Catholic

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<sup>4</sup> The PD's original structure and their first meeting is defined in depth in Paul Arthur, *The People's Democracy 1968-1973* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974), chapter 1 "October 1968-February 1969. A Child of Events?" no pagination, accessed April 17, 2011. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/arthur74a.htm#chap1>.

<sup>5</sup> Kevin Boyle, interview with W.H. Van Voris, (Winter 1972), in *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary*, ed. W.H. Van Voris, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 74.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

minority. It also gave many loyalists licenses to carry guns as members of the volunteer police force, the B-Specials. Yet, despite the outrage surrounding this Act, the PD kept their complaint to challenging its legitimacy in a constitutionally based government. The tenet reads: "This act gives the police power to take away your rights. It can be used to prevent strikes,"<sup>7</sup> a form of civil disobedience. These objections were relatively moderate and avoided mentioning any sectarian differences. Thus, the PD focused on restraint and moderation, showing respect for the government and seeking respect for themselves.

In spite of these overall signs of restraint and moderation, the PD did have some more radical influences. Groups like the Young Socialists and Anarchists as well as leaders like Michael Farrell and Eamonn McCann had firmer ideas of what the PD's strategy should be. As the year 1968 ended, when the PD met with frustration in Belfast and failed to instigate reform through their demonstrations at City Hall and Stormont, these radical forces pushed the group to take more provocative action.

In December, Terence O'Neill made a deal with NICRA to stop civil rights demonstrations and allow his new "five point reform package" to take effect.<sup>8</sup> This reform package included a change in housing allocation policies and the establishment of a Londonderry commission and an Ombudsman to promote further reform.<sup>9</sup> On December 9, 1968 O'Neill gave a televised speech, famously saying that Ulster was at a "crossroads." In one portion, he directly addressed civil rights activists:

Perhaps you are not entirely satisfied; but this is a democracy, and I ask you now with all sincerity to call your people off the streets and allow an atmosphere favorable to change

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<sup>7</sup> People's Democracy (PD), *People of Ulster we Ask You to Support ...*, (Belfast: PD, November 9, 1968), 1, CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/pd\\_leaflet\\_1068r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/pd_leaflet_1068r.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007). 204.

<sup>9</sup> Terence O'Neill, "Ulster at the Crossroads" televised speech, BBC and ITA (December 9, 1968), in *Ulster at the Crossroads*, ed. Terrence O'Neill, (London: Faber and Faber: 1969), 140-146.

develop. You are Ulstermen yourselves. You know we are all of us stubborn people, who will not be pushed too far. I believe that most of you want change, not revolution. Your voice has been heard, and clearly heard. Your duty now is to play your part in taking the heat out of the situation before blood is shed.<sup>10</sup>

Thus, O'Neill tried to use his rhetorical power to convince activists to keep the truce. However, with his references to "Ulstermen" who "will not be pushed" his speech was subtly threatening. He made it their "duty" to avoid "blood...shed."

The radical PD members saw the reforms as too little too late. Eamonn McCann said "radicals...should say to Terence O'Neill after his speech last night– not nearly good enough. We want the lot, we want it now– and that's not fast enough."<sup>11</sup> So, the PD voted to defy the order and organize the Long March. They decided to walk from Belfast to Derry, starting January 1, 1969. They adopted this position mainly for logistical reasons. The decisive vote was held over Christmas break after most of the students had gone home. Only the most committed, those impatient for change and wanting extreme action, had stayed. Since the PD still held its original, open structure, only those who attended the meeting could vote and their decision was binding. One document shows that some members expected and feared this result. Published on December 10, a flyer said, "If you are sincere about the future of this country then show your feelings AT THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRACY TONIGHT by voting for any motion opposing this march. REFORM needs the help of all the moderates in this University SO PLEASE SHOW IT."<sup>12</sup> Apparently, though, moderates failed to rally enough interest and support.

After the fact, reminiscing PD members downplayed the role extremists had played in the decision. Rather, contemporaries relied more on the PD members' fabled innocence to justify the

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 146.

<sup>11</sup> Eamonn McCann, *Derry Journal*. December 13, 1968, quoted in Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles*, (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2007), 204.

<sup>12</sup> Queen's University Moderates, *A Call to all Moderates: Our Country is on the Brink of Chaos*, (Belfast: Queen's University Moderates, December 10, 1968), 1, CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/all\\_mods\\_101268r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/all_mods_101268r.pdf).



decision to march. They argued the students were too idealistic to settle for O'Neill's compromise and truly did not know their decision would result in sectarian violence. Eddie McAteer, an older and more conservative civil rights leader, followed this trend of justification when he said of the PD's decision to march "I wouldn't have agreed with them," but "God love them in their innocence."<sup>13</sup> Thus, in spite of internal tensions and conflict within the group, the PD rhetoric attempted to simplify its history, saying idealists and innocents dominated before the march. They attempted to control the narrative of their history to make themselves the innocent victims and sectarian extremists the violent aggressors. While the original group was more moderate and perhaps naïve, retrospective sources seem to emphasize their innocence disproportionately. This was especially important to those writing in the mid seventies when sectarian violence had increased amidst the population and the leaders themselves were becoming enmeshed in it. To some extent, they must have been seeking to explain their current jadedness.

*The Long March: January 1-4, 1969*

As a result of their controversial decision, the People's Democracy set out from Belfast on January 1, 1969. The next four days were marked by sectarian violence, escalating from heckling threats and delays along the road, to a brutal ambush at Burntollet Bridge and, finally, to citywide riots in Derry. Reflecting on their experience, members of the PD expressed anger and disillusionment. They claimed they lost their sense of innocence and idealism along the road. They gained instead, in their opinion, a more realistic approach to the conflict.

Later that same year, the PD published *Burntollet* as an official account of the event. In over eighty detailed pages, through eyewitness accounts and photos, the authors sought to

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<sup>13</sup>Eddie McAteer, interview with W.H. Van Voris (Spring 1972), in *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary*, ed. W.H. Van Voris, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 90.

document the injustices committed against them by the police force, both the RUC and the volunteer B-Specials. The authors also wanted to describe the gross ineffectiveness of the government at Stormont. Thus, while the authors presented their work as factual and objective, the result is unabashedly cynical in the evidence it presents. They were seeking to control the narrative of events to reinforce their case of opposing discrimination against innocent victims.

The account begins somewhat sarcastically stating, "During the march, the walkers learned much of police behavior and political attitudes through a series of sharp, object lessons."<sup>14</sup> The work reads like the student report that it is, showing how the students had been newly educated in the realities of sectarianism, which provoked uncontrollable emotion and violence. One way it accomplishes this effect is through first framing the scene in a way that is sympathetic to the marchers, and then providing details of the opposition. This approach makes the opposition seem baffling and ridiculous. For example, as the march is beginning the report reads "The objectives proclaimed on the demonstrators' banners might have seemed innocuous enough, unlikely to give offence to any but arch-reactionaries. Yet a crowd of hostile people were gathering."<sup>15</sup> This description portrays the narrators as either confused by the reaction they caused or suspicious of conspiracy. It also places them completely in the right with the unionists merely overreacting. Therefore, while the authors did not emphasize the marchers' innocence directly, their tone implied that they were. Furthermore, the tone of the report grows increasingly negative and angry as circumstances continue to strip the marchers of their naïveté. The narrative repeats with growing frequency, "This was no isolated incident...there was no reason...no cause...no action was taken...nothing has been done...no enquiry...has been set up."<sup>16</sup> Thus, the

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<sup>14</sup>, Bowes Egan and Vincent McCormack. *Burntollet*. (London: LRS Publishers, 1969), introduction, no pagination. CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/egan.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. chapter "To Antrim."

<sup>16</sup> Ibid. chapter "Some Consequences."

narrators move from innocent confusion and shock to enlightened anger and negativity.

More unofficial and personal are the recollections of Professor Kevin Boyle. He recounts his loss of innocence along the road saying:

I can remember now my depression coming through Dungiven and seeing the Catholic school children out all waving to us and the Protestant school not waving and how that, in effect, was the end of my innocence in the Northern Ireland conflict, and the real worries about sectarianism that I had kept down becoming clear.<sup>17</sup>

Then, he relates an anecdote about teaming up with a policeman in the pressing crowd to protect his girlfriend from getting trampled.<sup>18</sup> While the story is told in a lighthearted manner, Boyle suggests his real fear for the girl and confusion over his feelings for the uncharacteristically helpful policeman. Other memories are more blatantly painful, like the one where John Hume, a civil rights activist and politician from Derry, came to their camp on the last night of the march.

Boyle remembers:

He was in tears about the riot in Derry and why the march shouldn't have been begun, what was he going to do, and so on. That was a bad scene, and I really wouldn't want to talk about that too much. There had been a civil rights truce; the PD had broken it, and new emotions were appearing on the surface, sectarian demonstrations.<sup>19</sup>

Boyle's account mainly registers regret and fear. When asked specifically about the ambush at Burntollet he says, "I was shaking in my shoes."<sup>20</sup> Therefore, he claims regret for both what happened along the march and what it did to his innocence.

Bernadette Devlin, another PD leader like Boyle, also wrote extensively about her personal experience on the march. As a member of the Faceless Committee, she made a famous speech at the march's conclusion, calling Derry the "capital city of injustice," which brought her international fame and launched her long career. In her memoir, written in late 1969, she

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<sup>17</sup>Boyle, interview with Van Voris, 85.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid. 87-8.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 89.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 91.

described her experience on the Long March. Her account is told with more humor and lightness than the others. She paints the opposition leaders as ridiculous, boasting about her smart remarks that made the police both look and feel foolish. When a policeman calls her “an impertinent woman,” she claims to have replied “and you sir are a very incompetent old man.” She subtly suggests that these comments got her in more trouble than she lets on, however, when her companions tell her to take sedatives and “for God’s sake, shut up!”<sup>21</sup> She also focuses on organizational details, like feeding a thousand people dinner, choosing what songs to sing and banners to carry, and wearing bad walking shoes.<sup>22</sup> However, she includes in these lighthearted anecdotes certain details, which show indirectly that she does have a greater awareness of the march’s significance. For example, when talking about the banners, she is careful to disclaim the Republican and Anarchist ones.<sup>23</sup> By the time of the book’s publication, unionists were already claiming the Civil Rights Movement was only a front for republicanism. This disclaimer was a calculated denial of this argument. Of her experience at Burntolllet, Devlin references the same fear as Boyle, saying of her escape, “I was a very clever girl: cowardice makes you clever.”<sup>24</sup> This cynical, self-mocking remark is especially compelling, coming from someone who prides herself on her intelligence and independence. Boyle’s growing sense of depression also comes through in Devlin’s account. While the narrative begins by recounting all of the pubs the group stopped at along the way, it finishes with her drinking “whiskey with sedatives.”<sup>25</sup>

In another source, an interview with *Playboy* from 1972, Devlin recounts her emotional reaction more directly. She says, “In the aftermath of the violence, I was so furious I could have gone into a police barrack with a machine gun and slaughtered everyone there. But, in retrospect,

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<sup>21</sup> Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul* (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1969), 143.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* 144, 140, 138.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* 140.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* 157.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 163.

I realize the police had actually done us a great favor. They dramatized our plight to the world.”

<sup>26</sup> Therefore, her initial reaction was violent and she restrained herself from that. However, her settled reaction was only a more calculated version of the original impulse, appreciating the value of violence performed by the other side. The interviewer continued to ask her about her own sense of the Long March and her subsequent actions promoting violence. The exchange reads:

*Playboy*: In recent years, the more enlightened Ulster political leaders have recognized the necessity of full Catholic participation in the life of the state. Doesn't violent Catholic resistance, in which you've participated, actually retard progress?

Devlin: What you don't seem to understand is that things began to change only after we started our resistance, a resistance that began peacefully and grew violent only in the face of persistent Unionist violence against us.<sup>27</sup>

Devlin's claim that sectarian violence had undermined the PD's "resistance" reveals her own sectarian biases, as she puts all the blame on the other side. Devlin accepted violence as an effective means of change in the society with which she had become disillusioned. Thus, both the official and personal accounts of the Long March show the PD members' disillusionment with their tactics, their country, and their cause of civil rights. Their language supports the idea that through their experience of violence and fear, they lost their innocence. The reflective sources also show a growing awareness of the potential power of violence.

#### *The Aftermath: 1969-72*

In the immediate aftermath of the Long March, sectarian violence broke out all over Northern Ireland. In Derry, the Catholic neighborhood set up barriers to keep the loyalists and the police out, calling the area Free Derry. From here, the PD emitted a radio broadcast giving a statement of policy. This statement differed greatly from the six tenets promulgated at the PD's founding. The PD had been formed in protest against violence in Derry in October, but now they

<sup>26</sup> Devlin, "Playboy Interview," 102.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. 99-100.

saw that “its tremendous success to date ha[d] been due more to the brutal and repressive response of an arrogant regime than to any other single factor.”<sup>28</sup> In effect, they were saying that violence had succeeded in creating change where the PD’s idealistic appeals to men’s better nature had failed. Their statement of “immediate demands” said:

To secure its objective the P.D. will use both parliamentary and extra-parliamentary means as appropriate. Recognizing also that grasping employers and exploiting imperialist powers rarely give up their ill-gotten gains without a struggle and that the law, the police, and the imperialist troops constantly defend the exploiters, the P.D. will not be intimidated by the threat of force and recognizes that a certain degree of counter force may be necessary to carry out the wishes of the people.<sup>29</sup>

Thus, they were nearing the conclusion that violence was a viable option when politics and civil demonstrations failed. They were giving up on the idea that they had the power and influence to reason civilly with the government.

This broadcast was also the beginning of a rhetoric characterized by veiled threats. In discussing the power of one person to spark rebellion, the broadcaster wondered: “somewhere, and somehow, and by somebody, a beginning must be made. Who strikes the first blow?”<sup>30</sup> Other violent terms refer back to the bombing campaigns, which had occurred throughout Northern Irish history. Headlines included “Mill Row Erupts,” “Explosion in Ulster,” and “The Real Terrorists,” which all talked about discrimination, but implied a certain kind of repercussion.<sup>31</sup> While not shocking individually, these words were used repeatedly and, therefore, implied a mindset of violence. Eventually, the rhetoric of violence moved from a

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<sup>28</sup> People’s Democracy (PD). *Statement of Policy Broadcast over Radio Free Derry - January 1969*, transcript in “Appendix F,” *The People’s Democracy 1968-73*. ed. Paul Arthur. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974), no pagination. CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/arthur74c.htm#appendixf>.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> People’s Democracy (PD). *PD Voice, Newspaper of the People’s Democracy*, no.1, Monthly, (Belfast: PD, June 1969), CAIN, accessed April 17, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/pd\\_voice\\_no1\\_0669\\_p1r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/pd_voice_no1_0669_p1r.pdf); People’s Democracy (PD). *Explosion in Ulster*. (London: PD, 1969), CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_explosion\\_69r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_explosion_69r.pdf); People’s Democracy (PD). *Free Citizen: Newspaper of the People’s Democracy*, 2. no. 27, Weekly, (Belfast: PD, April 9, 1971), CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/PD\\_Free\\_Citizen\\_090471r.jpg](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/PD_Free_Citizen_090471r.jpg);

metaphorical to literal meaning, as bombing campaigns began again in the early 1970s.

Toward the end of 1969, the PD began advocating violence. They took responsibility for inciting the masses, showing a clear desire to lead them in the struggle, no matter the dangerous consequences. In one newspaper they published, the PD practically supported Catholic sectarian rioters in Derry, saying that though they were “widely condemned, it is more important to understand them.”<sup>32</sup> This type of rhetoric was so similar to that of the Provisional IRA, who constantly spoke of defending their neighborhoods through their violent acts, that the message might have come across even stronger than it does now.<sup>33</sup> The article continues to tell other civil rights activists that since they stirred the people up, they cannot now “wash their hands of the situation.”<sup>34</sup> Thus, the PD propagandists played on the activists’ sense of guilt to manipulate emotional support. The article also claims that “these people are the oppressed for whom the movement has been fighting.”<sup>35</sup> This statement shows a significant change from early civil rights rhetoric, which attempted to reach out to all oppressed, lower class citizens, not just Catholic nationalists. Thus, the PD’s policy here has dramatically changed. The article concludes: “it is useless to just condemn and disclaim responsibility. This type of explosion will continue every time there is a sectarian jamboree.”<sup>36</sup>

The PD also began to show direct support for the newly flourishing paramilitary group, the Provisional IRA. In 1972, the PD branch in Dublin published a manifesto, containing the most extreme position on this matter. The document states “socialists must of course... cooperate

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<sup>32</sup> People's Democracy (PD). *PD Voice, Newspaper of the People's Democracy*, no.2, Monthly, (Belfast: PD, August 1969), 1. CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/PD\\_Voice\\_0869r.jpg](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/PD_Voice_0869r.jpg)

<sup>33</sup> Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*. New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002. 74-92.

<sup>34</sup> People's Democracy, *PD Voice... No.2*,

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid

with the Provisionals who are doing most of the fighting.”<sup>37</sup> It goes on to explain their vision whereby the socialists will act as directors of ideology, while the civil rights activists and the Provos will work in tandem to wage an “anti imperialist war.”<sup>38</sup> Of the Provos members themselves, the manifesto states:

They are young, brave and dedicated – ready to sacrifice their lives in the war against imperialism. Most of them want to see Ireland ruled by her people, not by the bosses but they are remarkably naïve about politics many believing that is something reserved for gangsters and con men and that the imperialists will be defeated by the gun alone. Politics and the gun must go hand in hand and politics direct the gun.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, the Dublin PD had a low opinion of the Provisionals’ political and intellectual abilities, but they did value their readiness to fight. The PD members no longer perceived themselves as naïve about politics or the necessity of using violence. Civil resistance is not even mentioned. It can be argued that the PD branch in Dublin was more extreme than the rest of the organization in Northern Ireland. It is the only one that spread this overt opinion. However, another part of the same document reprints word for word the “immediate demands” of the 1969 PD in Derry quoted above.<sup>40</sup> Also, other publications by the PD speak of students travelling down to Dublin to meet with the organization there, showing that they were still in good standing and communicating with each other.<sup>41</sup>

### Rationalizing Violence: 1969-1972

The PD members’ policy on violence had changed in the aftermath of the Long March. In order to embrace violence, however, they had to have a way to rationalize it. Thus, they needed a

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<sup>37</sup> People's Democracy (PD), Dublin Branch. “Provisionals,” *Unfree Citizen*. (Dublin: PD, December 10, 1971), reprinted in *People's Democracy: What it stands for, its Attitudes*, 8. (Dublin: PD, February 1972), 9. CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_standsfor\\_0272r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_standsfor_0272r.pdf).

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> People's Democracy (PD), Dublin Branch. “PD Political Programme,” (November 29, 1970), in *People's Democracy: What it stands for, its Attitudes*. 2. (Dublin: PD, February 1972), CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_standsfor\\_0272r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_standsfor_0272r.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> People's Democracy (PD). *Free Citizen - Anniversary Issue*, (Belfast: PD, October 2, 1970), 5, CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/pd\\_freecitizen\\_021070r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/pd_freecitizen_021070r.pdf).



framework to explain why the Irish people had led them to experience violence and why they themselves now considered violence a viable option. To create this framework, they relied on the traditional constructs of a narrated history describing a deeply divided society.

Using history to explain modern violence was not a new thing. In fact, many contemporaries of the PD used it to justify their own positions on the conflict. For example, Eddie McAteer, a Nationalist Party MP, said, modern day events were just a “rerun of a very, very old film, in fact... 350 years old.”<sup>42</sup> He then continued to expand more fully:

You have this cyclical appearance of the Irish struggle for freedom. At times there’s a constitutional movement; then they weary of it because you cannot accomplish very much by talking peacefully. When they weary of constitutionalism, then there is an outbreak of violence. At times we wander about in such matters as civil rights, civil liberties, and so on, and to an earlier period in our history in the great agrarian conflict over the ownership of the land, the land war. But all of these I insist are side issues, really. You have the old racial-colonial struggle going on, and this is the key to the whole problem.<sup>43</sup>

Unionists too often used their history to establish their identity and their place in the conflict. For example, prime minister and UUP member Lord Brookeborough said, “I’m not Irish, I’m an Ulsterman—my family came here in ’97, I mean 1597.”<sup>44</sup> However, while historical justification was not a new idea, the PD’s embrace of it was new.

In late 1969, several leaders of the PD were interviewed together. During the interview, Eamonn McCann described why he thought violence broke out in Derry. He says that civil rights activists called Catholics’ attention to their history of discrimination. This angered Catholics by recalling their nationalists’ traditions. When the loyalists and police compounded Catholics’ anger by threatening and blatantly persecuting them, “they made instinctively for a Protestant working class area once their emotions had been aroused, and they left no doubt in anyone’s

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<sup>42</sup> McAteer, interview with Van Voris, 12.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. 14.

<sup>44</sup> Lord Brookeborough, (Sir Basil Brooke), interview with W.H. Van Voris (Spring 1972), in *Violence in Ulster: An Oral Documentary*. ed. W.H. Van Voris, (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975), 4.

mind that when they got there they intended to beat the living daylights out of any Protestant they found.”<sup>45</sup> McCann continues, “Everyone applauds loudly when one says in a speech that we are not sectarian, we are fighting for the rights of all Irish workers, but really that’s because they see this as the new way of getting at the Protestants.”<sup>46</sup> This passage indicates McCann’s professed belief that sectarianism was ingrained in the people along with the idea that, when faced with sectarianism, the people would respond violently. Non-violent civil demonstrations were a “new way” to fight, but they built hopes too high and so traditional ways of fighting inevitably resurfaced. However, other PD leaders said that McCann’s view was too cynical. Michael Farrell counters, “I think that Eamonn’s view is very much conditioned by Derry.”<sup>47</sup> He implies that McCann’s experience with close violence had jaded him. He may even be referring to the sense of guilt surrounding all the PD works after the Long March. McCann does not object.

Supporting McCann’s theory that the Irish people superimposed their country’s history onto their own, Bernadette Devlin’s memoir reveals her tendency to connect her experience with violence to Ireland’s generally violent past. Before her father’s relatively early death during her childhood, she says he told her Irish folktales and history narratives as bedtime stories. These stories were “told by an Irishman, with an Irishman’s feelings.”<sup>48</sup> She says she has no proof that her father was an IRA man. However, she continues to describe her suspicion with a folktale-like story. Behind the family’s house, there was the “Black Bog,” which “never gave up an IRA man.”<sup>49</sup> When the police would gather around the bog looking for suspects in the latest IRA

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<sup>45</sup> Liam Baxter, et. al., “PD Militants Discuss Strategy,” (April 20, 1969), in *Explosion in Ulster*. 34. (London: PD, 1969), 34. CAIN accessed April 18, 2011. [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_explosion\\_69r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_explosion_69r.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid

<sup>48</sup> Devlin, *Price of My Soul*, 35.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. 37.

campaign, her mother would look out the window and mysteriously say, "they'll never get your father now."<sup>50</sup> In spite of this association, her father is described as impossibly good and heroic. Even her jocular tone cannot hide her almost unqualified admiration for him. Thus, early on the reader connects her father's heroism to the legendary IRA's. She later jokes how in her youth even she was tempted to join in the violent rebellions, although for the most part she maintained a "consciously virtuous attitude to the whole problem."<sup>51</sup> These were not vague ponderings. Rather, she had a detailed plan to blow up "an American communications base... custom built for causing an international crisis."<sup>52</sup> While she admits that she eventually found a place in the PD and then as a politician, her account never loses the sense of mystery and heroism originally associated with the IRA. Devlin credits them for protecting the PD on the last night of the Long March. Like the safety of the Black Bog, she describes the area where they stayed the night in "Brackaghreilly, on Slieve Gallion Mountain" as "a republican stronghold."<sup>53</sup> Devlin does not limit this connection to herself and other nationalists either, but assumes that even loyalists associate the present conflict with that of the past. In her *Playboy* interview, she says of her experience at Burntollet:

I stood there like a statue watching people being clubbed all around me. The thing I remember most clearly to this very day is the expression on the faces of the police—their tight thick smiles, their eager eyes. They were *enjoying* it. It was as if they had waited 50 years for this.<sup>54</sup>

Fifty years ago, republicans had led the Easter Rising in Dublin against British imperialism.

Devlin suggests that the loyalists had adopted this historical grievance of their sect, making it a part of their individual identity.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 73.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. 81.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid 150.

<sup>54</sup> Devlin, "Playboy Interview," 101-2.

Eamonn McCann, in his 1974 memoir, also wrote in depth about the connection between history and the modern conflict. However, he looks further back in time than Devlin and emphasizes the way in which politics and religion have been “bound up together” in the Catholic’s history of oppression, saying that “in many ways [they are] the same thing.”<sup>55</sup> Like Devlin, he speaks of how this history had been ingrained in him since childhood. He first recounts a story in which “children would be taken out to Father Hegarty’s Rock” and told how a priest had been betrayed and murdered by “redcoats.”<sup>56</sup> Like the tale of the Black Bog, this story takes on a mythic quality. The British had convinced Father Hegarty to trust them and not drown himself trying to swim away. When he returned to shore however, they “bayoneted him to death.” McCann concludes the story saying, “It was probably true.”<sup>57</sup> The facts may be exaggerated but children knew the moral of the story was not. McCann also speaks of the penal laws and the Great Famine of 1845 as more historical and widely known examples of British betrayal and oppression of the Irish. He concludes his history by mentioning the civil rights song “Faith of Our Fathers” to show the seeming inseparableness of religion, politics, and heritage.<sup>58</sup>

Beyond simply acknowledging that this connection exists in the minds of the people however, the interview with PD leaders pushes the issue even further. The speakers do not just admit the connection but also debate about how they can use it to their advantage. The interviewer asks the leaders about the “living revolutionary tradition in Ireland” as though it were a settled thing. McCann explains:

It’s Republicanism, and the idea of the revolution is implanted in the minds of the Irish people surrounded by the glory of 1916 and its revolutionary martyrs. The idea of revolution is not at all alien to the Irish working class...when one calls for revolution, no matter what one actually demands there is always a link to Connolly and to 1916 and the

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<sup>55</sup> Eamonn McCann, *War on an Irish Town*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (original 1974), (Penguin Books Limited: London 1993), 69.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid

<sup>57</sup> Ibid

<sup>58</sup> Ibid

armed uprising. What we have to do is to complete the national revolution by making the theoretical and practical link between what we are doing now and what was fought for in 1916.<sup>59</sup>

Thus, McCann suggests that the PD should adopt a strategy to consciously draw upon the perceived Irish predisposition to violence. Whether the leaders all wanted to exploit this predisposition or not, they all agreed that it existed. But, Farrell suggests as a possibility harnessing specifically “Catholic power” to help the socialist cause. He even relates it positively to the Bolsheviks uniting with the Soviet party.<sup>60</sup> The published PD propaganda was already promoting violence as an effective means to an end. Here though, the leaders argued to make this means more enticing to a people already entrenched in a violent mindset. Later propaganda shows this strategy in action. One recruitment pamphlet starts with a history lesson saying, “From earliest times Ireland’s history has been that of invasion, conquest and settlement...”<sup>61</sup> It then tries to show evidence of capitalism and imperialism causing chronic problems throughout Irish history which the socialist will now address. Other pamphlets attempt to draw the connection between the modern PD socialists and James Connolly, the socialist leader in the Easter rising of 1916. One newspaper publication, detailing mainly current events, has a full-page picture memorializing him.<sup>62</sup> Thus, the PD worked to bring the Catholic minority’s historically violent struggles to the forefront of people’s minds to spur them to action. Their use of particularly socialist history is elaborated on in the next chapter.

### Conclusion:

PD rhetoric completely changed in the aftermath of the Long March. The members largely lost faith in politics and civil resistance and promoted violence as an effective means of

<sup>59</sup> Baxter et. al., “PD Militants Discuss Strategy,” 38.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid. 42.

<sup>61</sup> People's Democracy (PD). *The Real Ulster '71*, (Belfast: PD, 1971), 4. CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_realulster71\\_71r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_realulster71_71r.pdf).

<sup>62</sup> People's Democracy, *Free Citizen: Anniversary Issue*. 3.

change. They justified this change of policy by portraying themselves as idealists who had lost their innocence through their experience during the harrowing Long March. Finally, they rationalized the violence of others by connecting it with their Irish history and culture. All of this framing was effective. Years later, playwright Anne Devlin, a Belfast native, wrote a play entitled "Long March." In it, she stresses both the innocence of the students and the way in which they stepped into a history so big it was out of their control. One character says, "I still remember that time when we thought we were beginning a new journey: the long march. What we didn't see was that it had begun a long time before with someone else's journey; we were simply getting through the steps in our own time."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Anne Devlin, "A Woman Calling," in *Ourselves Alone, with a Woman Calling and The Long March*, Anne Devlin, (London: Faber& Faber, 1986), 155.

### Chapter 3: PD Socialism

Chapter two demonstrated how the PD developed as a civil rights organization before and after the Long March in January 1969 and the way it began to use the history, both of its own development and of Ireland, to legitimize its goals and its strategy of violence. This chapter shows how the PD evolved over the following years to become a distinctly socialist group intent on creating a Workers Republic through violent revolution. The PD leaders struggled to achieve their ideals though. They failed to impress their socialist ideology onto the Irish people, but were instead overcome by their own sectarian differences. To demonstrate this process, this chapter first describes the continuing violence the PD members endured. Then, it defines the PD's socialism and how it developed. From here, it examines the PD leaders' strategies to achieve their goals, both how they debated dealing with sectarianism and how they actually implemented these strategies. Then, it examines the failure of their strategies for overcoming sectarianism and the circumstances of violence surrounding them. Lastly, this chapter examines the PD members' final acceptance of sectarian violence through their embrace of the Provisional IRA after the period of internment began in Northern Ireland. This chapter, therefore, provides a clear picture of the PD's socialism and how its leaders used their ideals initially to fight against but ultimately to give into sectarian violence.

#### Context of Violence:

After the People's Democracy led the Long March in January 1969, Northern Ireland broke out into rioting and violence that would only grow worse and would not cease until the Good Friday agreement in 1998. The PD and NICRA led civil rights marches through the spring of 1969, which came to end dependably in sectarian riots.<sup>1</sup> Loyalist bombing campaigns caused

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<sup>1</sup> This and all following dates are taken from Martin Melaugh, compiler, *A Chronology of the Conflict*, CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/othelem/chron.htm>

widespread fear and anger, leading to a boom in IRA recruitment as young recruits saw the need to protect their Catholic neighborhoods. At the same time, tensions increased within the IRA as the old guard continued to follow the liberal and more politically focused strategy of Cathal Goulding, while the younger leaders, especially Gerry Adams in Belfast, began to call for a return of traditional republican values. For them, this meant that an armed struggle was the only effective method of revolution.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, elections in April 1969 showed the polarization of the people when Prime Minister Terrence O'Neill was voted out of office in Stormont in favor of the stauncher unionist, James Chichester-Clark. On the other side of the divide, more Catholic districts sent a few young reforming radicals to office, including Bernadette Devlin, who became the youngest female Member of Parliament at Westminster. As the traditional marching season began for Protestants in July, rioting turned to bloodshed. In August, the Battle of the Bogside, a localized civil war provoked by the loyalist ceremonial marching season, began in Derry and quickly extended to Belfast.<sup>3</sup>

In response, on August 14th, the government at Westminster deployed British troops to Northern Ireland. While these troops enjoyed a "honeymoon period," they soon compromised their position of neutrality.<sup>4</sup> The nationalists came to see them as hindering their efforts to defend themselves against the B Specials police force and UVF paramilitaries. In an official statement of the IRA, Cathal Goulding transmitted a message to the British government and troops saying, "We warn you that *if* you allow yourselves to be used to suppress the legitimate attempts of the people to defend themselves against the "B" Specials and the sectarian Orange murder gangs

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<sup>2</sup> Ed Moloney, *A Secret History of the IRA*. (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 2002), 70-74.

<sup>3</sup> The Unionist group, the Apprentice Boys, march around Derry annually to commemorate the historic defense of the city for William of Orange in 1690.

<sup>4</sup> This Battle and the changing perceptions of British troop deployment is expanded on in Niall Ó Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites: Derry and the Birth of the Irish Troubles*. (Cork: Cork University Press, 1997), 179-80.



then you will have to take the consequences.”<sup>5</sup> However, while strong, Goulding’s words were not enough to convince either the British troops or his own that the current IRA had the power to carry out this threat. In January of 1970, the IRA officially informed the public of their split, forming the Official IRA and a more aggressive offshoot, which would come to be known as the Provisional IRA. This new group quickly took over the defense of the Catholic areas of Belfast and then began a bombing campaign of its own.<sup>6</sup>

Meanwhile, the British continued to take a harsh stance toward IRA and civil rights agitators. In March 1970, the British army started using CS gas to subdue riots in Belfast and rubber bullets quickly followed. New elections put even more right-winged candidates in office, including Ian Paisley. Devlin, though, held on to her position despite her imprisonment from June to October. On July 3rd, the Army instated a curfew on Falls Road in Belfast and searched the houses of many Catholics with no regard for their property rights. While these searches did uncover several weapons, many of the houses were left ransacked and even burned to the ground. This event annihilated any lingering Catholic support for the British Army in Northern Ireland. The situation continued to deteriorate until August 9, 1971 when the first round of internment occurred, with the approval of both the Westminster and Stormont governments. This imprisonment without trial soon came to symbolize government-endorsed injustice in Northern Ireland. From August 1971 to December 1975, when the policy was overturned, 1,981 people were detained. Of these, 1,874 were Catholic republicans, while only 107 were Protestant loyalists.<sup>7</sup>

This is a long, yet by no means inclusive list of events from 1969 to 1971, which fueled

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<sup>5</sup> Cathal Goulding, “Statement by Cathal Goulding, then IRA Chief of Staff,” *Public Records of Northern Ireland* (PRONI) CAB/9/B/312/1 (August 1969), CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/proni/1969/proni\\_CAB-9-B-312-1\\_1969-nd.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/proni/1969/proni_CAB-9-B-312-1_1969-nd.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Moloney, *Secret History of the IRA*, 74-80.

<sup>7</sup> Melaugh, compiler, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/intern/chron.htm>.

the conflict of the Troubles, illustrating the circumstances under which the members of the People's Democracy labored. In December of 1970, the financial cost of the disturbances and riots over the past two years were estimated to be £5.5 million. Malcolm Sutton's updated *Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Ireland* attributes 42 deaths to violence during the conflicts between July 1969 and December 1970, a figure that grew dramatically in 1971, peaking at 472 in 1972.<sup>8</sup> Through examining their changing rhetoric, chapter two analyzed how the PD members' perceptions of violence changed after their experiences during the Long March. However, their experience of violence was ongoing and almost constant after January 1969. Therefore, while there was a shift in PD ideology and rhetoric after the Long March, because of constant pressure, the organization continued to evolve in a more violent direction. Civil rights began as a fight for better housing and voting privileges, but, by this stage, the stakes had been raised. For many nationalists, civil rights came to encompass a fight for the right to defend oneself and one's property from arbitrary invasion and destruction.

#### PD Socialism:

In this context, the PD embraced socialist ideals and became a cohesive group, now driven more by ideology than the desire to achieve specific civil rights. Some PD leaders, notably Michael Farrell and Eamonn McCann, had held socialist ideals at the founding of the PD. However, because of the PD's open structure and the involvement of other, more ideologically diverse students, the group as a whole did not emphasize these socialist ideals until after the Long March. After this event though, PD membership changed to consist mainly of radical socialist thinkers, with support extending outside the university. The group itself welcomed these changes, thinking they would make them stronger. One PD publication claims

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<sup>8</sup> Malcolm Sutton, *An Index of Deaths from the Conflict in Northern Ireland*. (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1994), CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/>.

that, after the violence of Burntollet, “the P.D. was smaller, much smaller, but its members were dedicated and knew where they were going. And a small group of determined revolutionaries can do far more than thousands of confused and bewildered people, ever prone to manipulation.”<sup>9</sup>

The socialist ideology of Farrell and McCann took over, and those who disagreed, such as Kevin Boyle, either dropped out or backed off significantly. Other leaders, notably Bernadette Devlin, emerged from the march with new conviction and clarity, asserting well developed, personalized socialist ideals. These leaders enforced an ideological shift in every area of the PD organization.

As scholar Owen Dudley Edwards wrote in the early 1970s:

Michael Farrell emerged as an able and effective pamphleteer. Cyril Toman's brand of abrasive knowledgeability proved well adapted for television appearance. Eamonn McCann as an orator won the admiration of almost every audience he encountered. Bernadette Devlin in the course of her intellectual Odyssey from liberal nationalism to Connolly Socialism became an outstanding debater.<sup>10</sup>

In this way then, the leaders of the PD became outspoken, fully developed ideologists. As a result, the PD established itself as one of the most left-wing organizations in Northern Ireland.<sup>11</sup>

The basis for PD socialism was the hope that the oppressed working class, whether rural or urban, Catholic or Protestant, would unite together and overthrow the imperialist and capitalist powers ruling over them. The group published their “Aims” in November 1970 and issued this statement as a mandate at least through 1972.<sup>12</sup> This document reveals four points of focus. First, it shows a dedication to struggling socialist causes all over the world. It reads:

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<sup>9</sup> People's Democracy (PD), Dublin Branch. “The People’s Democracy,” *Unfree Citizen*. (Dublin: PD, January 7, 1972), reprinted in *People's Democracy: What it stands for, its Attitudes*, 15. (Dublin: PD, February 1972), CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_standsfor\\_0272r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_standsfor_0272r.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> Owen Dudley Edwards, *The Sins of our Fathers: Roots of Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Gill and Macmillan 1970), 258-259. Quoted in Paul Arthur. *The People’s Democracy 1968-1973*. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974) Conclusion, no pagination, CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/arthur74c.htm#conclusion>

<sup>11</sup> As time continued, McCann and Devlin both broke with the PD officially and became independents. However, their ideas and the issues they promoted continued to persuade most common members of the PD.

<sup>12</sup> People's Democracy (PD), Dublin Branch. “PD Political Programme,” (November 29, 1970), in *People's Democracy: What it stands for, its Attitudes*. 1. (Dublin: PD, February 1972), CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_standsfor\\_0272r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_standsfor_0272r.pdf).

The aim of the Peoples Democracy is the establishment of a socialist system of society in Ireland and throughout the world... Since complete socialism cannot be established in any one country, or so long as the great imperialist powers like the U.S.A. remain capitalist, the PD will readily co-operate with and render every assistance to socialists in all other countries.<sup>13</sup>

The leaders put these thoughts into action by forming groups in the Republic of Ireland as well as the North, through Bernadette Devlin and Eamonn McCann's support for the Black Panther Party in New York in 1969, and through their well publicized opinions of the dangers of the Communist Party taking over true socialists in the Soviet Union and France.<sup>14</sup>

Secondly, the mandate stresses how the PD wished to apply its socialist ideals to Ireland specifically. It states:

Believing that both parts of Ireland today suffer from the twin evils of capitalism and imperialism the P.D. is firmly committed to the removal of British troops and Anglo-American economic control from Ireland, and to breaking the stranglehold of grasping native capitalists over the Irish people. The Workers' Republic will be a Society in which all natural resources, major industries and financial institutions will be publicly owned and jointly controlled by those who work in them, or use their products.<sup>15</sup>

Here, the PD specifically names its enemies as Britain, America and the "native capitalists," who include the Unionist hegemony at Stormont and unscrupulous Irish businessmen. It portrays the working class's oppressors as elites working for their own personal profit as they seek to subdue the lower classes.

Next, the PD's aims include the "guarantee to each citizen a home, a livelihood and a job,

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> The media stir surrounding Devlin and McCann's bestowal of the key to New York City on the Panthers is described in Brian Dooley, *Black and Green: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland & Black America*. (Chicago: Pluto Press, 1998), 66. References to the Communist Party in France and Russia found in People's Democracy (PD), Dublin Branch. "The Officials," *Unfree Citizen*. (Dublin: PD, December 17, 1971), reprinted in *People's Democracy: What it stands for, its Attitudes*, 12. (Dublin: PD, February 1972), CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_standsfor\\_0272r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_standsfor_0272r.pdf); Liam Baxter, et. al., "PD Militants Discuss Strategy," (April 20, 1969), in *Explosion in Ulster*. (London: PD, 1969), 41. CAIN accessed April 18, 2011. [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_explosion\\_69r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_explosion_69r.pdf).

<sup>15</sup> People's Democracy, "Political Programme," 1.

plus an adequate medical and educational service.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, they continued to argue for their original civil rights causes. The PD still attempted to work with NICRA somewhat, and many of their posters focused on these issues. However, these causes were now just a part of the larger goal of establishing a Workers’ Republic. Finally, the PD states:

The Workers' Republic will also guarantee to all its citizens freedom of political and religious belief and freedom to disseminate political and religious views. It will not grant a special position or privileges to any religious group...[but] will be based on a mutual respect for the different cultural tendencies in Ireland, and will work to create one unified community...<sup>17</sup>

Thus, the PD adopted a strong anti-sectarian platform. It stressed unity and tolerance among the entire working class, condemning the “destruction of one tradition by another,” or in other words, sectarian violence.

Furthermore, some of the PD leaders pushed this last idea of toleration and freethinking to extremes and became anti-religious. The leaders of the PD were mainly young students or young graduates who were disillusioned by the bitter sectarianism displayed by their parents’ generation in the name of religion. Though their widely spread publications tended to downplay this, the PD socialists’ ideals deliberately avoided religious connections that would link them to one denomination or the other. Many of their followers found this one of the most appealing things about the organization, while their critics found it appalling. For example, Devlin blatantly said in 1969:

Others say everyone knows you are a socialist but that one must not say so because that will offend people who think that socialism is communism and is anti-Christianity... although I personally believe there is very little Christianity in this country, there is a lot of religion, and the one way you would unite the Protestants and Catholics is by trying to get rid of both churches at once.<sup>18</sup>

So, while the PD did not publish anti-religious statements and rarely commented on their

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Baxter et. al. “PD Militants discuss Strategy,” 35.

personal beliefs, their writings show an undercurrent of distrust in the establishment and the power of the elite pope and pastors to sway the emotionally led working class.

*PD Strategy Debated:*

Although their socialist aims brought the PD leaders together after the Long March, the best strategy for achieving these aims caused tension, especially between Michael Farrell and Eamonn McCann. This tension came forward in an interview Peter Gibbon conducted on April 20, 1969. For this interview, all the key leaders of the PD were gathered together. Cyril Toman noted that “coming together for this interview is probably the first time the people here have discussed problems in any depth for a couple of months”<sup>19</sup> Perhaps because of this, the interview reads more like meeting minutes as the leaders present their thoughts. Often the leaders disagree, and Farrell and McCann eventually argue.

Their argument began with a question concerning how the PD planned to overcome sectarian division within the working class. Farrell responded first, saying that the PD should embrace “areas where the Catholic population is concentrated and militant” and encourage them to set up councils with “Catholic power” in a “socialist form.” With these councils set up as models to counteract the current, suppressive model of government at Stormont, the Protestant workers would see their superior design, that they “fulfill class demands rather than creed demands,” and soon join the cause.<sup>20</sup> McCann vehemently objected:

There is nothing more calculated to prove to the Protestant working class that the Civil Rights people all wear papal flags under their jerseys, than the establishment of unofficial pope-head councils ...It would remove the possibility of winning any Protestants over to our cause.<sup>21</sup>

Rather than rely on their current Catholic base, he continued, “If you want to elect a socialist

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid. 37.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid. 39.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid. 40.

council you must campaign on radical socialist issues.”<sup>22</sup> However, Farrell saw that, without a base, this campaign could not be successful. McCann also acknowledged that the majority of people were not convinced of socialism. However, he thought they should start then with education, not elections. He argued:

What we have got to do now is realize what a mess we have made of the whole thing over the past few months.... We have failed to give a socialist perspective because we have failed to create any socialist organization...Rather than set up councils, we must try to set up some sort of radical socialist front between republicans and ourselves.<sup>23</sup>

Farrell ended the discussion by suggesting they try both strategies at once, taking advantage of their foothold in the Catholic sector, while simultaneously seeking to educate both populations in socialist principles. He concluded, “I do not want to be represented as an advocate of ‘Catholic power’ but I do insist that we have to explore the more radical possibilities of the base that we do have...the Catholic section of the working class.”<sup>24</sup>

Though this was just one discussion, disagreements over strategy would continue to plague the PD. Eventually, Eamonn McCann separated from the organization, though he continued as a formidable socialist and activist in Northern Ireland. Bernadette Devlin sided with him in the separation. She summarizes the difference of opinions well by saying:

There is no denying that my personal position is much closer to Eamonn than it is to Michael. This is not a personality clash. There is a difference in tactics. It depends on whether one accepts that you have a base in the Catholic working class and that you then proceed to radicalize them, leaving the door open for the Protestants to join or whether you move completely out and take very few people with you, standing on clear, socialist basis...<sup>25</sup>

Despite their friendly relations though, both sides criticized the other harshly at times with

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. 41.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Bernadette Devlin, *The Gown*, (Queen’s University, Belfast: March 3, 1970), quoted in Paul Kingsley, *Londonderry Revisited: A Loyalist Analysis of the Civil Rights Controversy*. (Belfast: Belfast Publications, 1989), 165.

Devlin calling Farrell a “militant Catholic” and a PD essay later calling McCann a “Socialist sectarian.”<sup>26</sup>

The PD then greatly struggled with the best way to impress their socialist ideals on to their sectarian society, especially during the turbulent and violent times. Their documents reveal for a time an uneasy compromise between McCann’s strategy of socialist education and Farrell’s strategy of maximizing Republican power for socialist causes. The best example of this compromise is “The People’s Festival: Red Fortnight,” held in May 1971.<sup>27</sup> In line with McCann’s strategy, the events of the week were almost entirely devoted to educating the masses on socialist theory and its application to the crisis of Northern Ireland. Events included a “Connolly Commemoration Meeting” and a lecture by Michael Farrell on “The Growth of Sectarianism.” They also had many notable speakers as guest lecturers, including George Gilmore, a Protestant leader of the left and a nationalist, and Peadar O’Donnell, the “founder of the Irish Red Army during the War of Independence” who spoke on the Irish Civil War and Irish history post partitioning.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the organizers hoped this festival would be a time of intense analysis and learning about Irish history and the role of the working class in it. However, in line with Farrell’s strategy, the event also showed the PD focusing their efforts on gathering the Catholic population to their cause first, rather than the Protestants. The PD held the Festival because “Soon the Unionist clique [would] have their Ulster ’71 Festival well under way.”<sup>29</sup> The Stormont government had organized the Ulster ’71 Festival to mark the jubilee of the Northern Irish Parliament. The PD discredited the government festival as an exhibition of unionism and a frivolous extravagance, in light of current problems. Other republican and nationalist groups

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<sup>26</sup> Devlin, *The Gown*, 165; People's Democracy Dublin. “The People's Democracy,” 15.

<sup>27</sup> People's Democracy (PD). *People's Democracy: People's Festival Red Fortnight May 1st-15th*, (Belfast: PD, 1971), 1, CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/pd\\_redfortnight\\_0471r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/leaflet/pd_redfortnight_0471r.pdf).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*



shared their disdain. Therefore, by holding an alternate festival, even though it was ostensibly intended to welcome all the working class, the PD appeared to provide a nationalist alternative.

*Socialism and Republican History:*

On the whole, it was Farrell's strategy that came to dominate PD policy. While the PD leaders continued to present socialism as a way to unite the entire working class, they did this through changing the nationalist narrative only slightly to present a socialist view of Irish history and culture. This is most evident in the way they stressed their association with the heroes of 1916, who were both socialists and nationalists, especially James Connolly. They sought to make "a theoretical and practical link between" their own aims and "what was fought for in 1916."<sup>30</sup> Born in Scotland to Irish immigrant parents, Connolly was a noted socialist thinker and a martyr to the nationalist cause, executed following the Easter Rising of 1916. The fiftieth anniversary of the rising in 1966 and the centenary of Connolly's birth in 1968 raised interest in his story throughout the nation.<sup>31</sup> The PD chose to capitalize on his popularity. The members often referred to themselves as Connolly Socialists, a simple way of translating their ideals to their followers. The average Irish worker may not have known the specifics of socialist theory, but he or she would have definitely known who Connolly was and respected anyone who claimed to follow his legacy. Furthermore, one of the PD's newspapers included a lengthy excerpt from Connolly's "Workshop Talks" from 1908.<sup>32</sup> In this excerpt, Connolly declared, "Let us free Ireland," warning nationalists against sectarianism and over eagerness to free themselves from the British yoke. Instead, he asked them to free themselves from all landlords and elite classes, saying a capitalist Irish Republic would be just as harmful and unjust as a British one. By using

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<sup>30</sup> Baxter et. al., "PD Militants discuss Strategy," 38. Excerpt spoken by McCann.

<sup>31</sup> Ó Cathasaigh, Aindrias. "Introduction: Connolly Lost and Found," in *The Lost Writings*, James Connolly, ed. Aindrias O Cathasigh, (Pluto Press: Chicago, 1997), 9.

<sup>32</sup> People's Democracy (PD). *Free Citizen - Anniversary Issue*, (Belfast: PD, October 2, 1970), 3, CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/pd\\_freecitizen\\_021070r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/pd_freecitizen_021070r.pdf).

the words of an unassailable hero the PD might criticize the Republic more freely without alienating their nationalist base or their followers in the Republic itself. It also served as a subtle warning not to let the fight for nationalism overshadow the fight for the working class.

While forging a direct link to Connolly, the PD also embraced the traditional nationalist themes of land and production rights. They believed that the goal of a socialist revolution was to place material goods into the hands of its rightful owners, those who actually worked to tend and create the goods. However, Irish history, even in urban areas, was especially tied to the idea of land ownership. Before the plantations of 1610, the native Irish owned the land communally. Since it was taken from them, the idea of land had been a source of debate and a reason for war among the people. The PD emphasized a return of the land to its rightful residents.<sup>33</sup> Other Irish socialists, like Connolly, had already made this connection. In his *Labour in Irish History*, he outlined all of Irish history through this lens of oppressive elites repressing the natural, native rights of the people to their land. He wrote:

As we have again and again pointed out, the Irish question is a social question, the whole age-long fight of the Irish people against their oppressors resolves itself, in the last analysis into a fight for the mastery of the means of life, the sources of production, in Ireland. Who would own and control the land? The people or the invaders; and if the invaders, which set of them – the most recent swarm of land-thieves, or the sons of the thieves of a former generation?<sup>34</sup>

This same rationale was still being used in the late 1960s. Even though many had moved off their family farms and urban workers made up the majority of socialist support, Irish socialists continued to draw the same connection between the evils of capitalism and the traditional land struggle. In 1966, Peter Gibbon, a minor socialist in Ireland who interacted and

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<sup>33</sup>; People's Democracy (PD). *The Real Ulster '71*, (Belfast: PD, 1971), 4. CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_realulster71\\_71r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_realulster71_71r.pdf); Peter Gibbon, "Religion and Class." *New Left Review*. (London: Balding and Mansell, April 7 1966), reprinted in *Explosion in Ulster*, (London, PD, 1969). 8-12. CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011. [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_explosion\\_69r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_explosion_69r.pdf).

<sup>34</sup> James Connolly, *Labour in Irish History* (1910), in *Labour in Ireland* (Fleet Street, Dublin: Colm O Lochlain at the Sign of the Three Candles, 1920), 167-8.

published with PD members, wrote an essay embracing the ideas in Connolly's book, which traced the struggles for agrarian reform through the Battle of the Boyne, O'Connell's Catholic Emancipation and land reform acts, and Parnell's fight for Home Rule.<sup>35</sup> Each of these battles occurred for complex reasons, but Gibbon distilled each example, showing how the elites installed a system of land regulations which intentionally kept Ireland from competing effectively with British and international markets.

The PD leaders re-published the writings of both Connolly and Gibbon. They sought to demonstrate that their socialist revolution would overthrow the same economic oppression, which nationalists fought against. Furthermore, through connecting their socialism with the traditional land debate, they sought to put it in terms the Irish would understand. Michael Farrell alleged:

Republicanism, which is a radical movement based mainly on small peasant farmers, is the culmination of a long popular tradition of agitation for some sort of co-operatively organized farming society. This is something which more orthodox forms of metropolitan socialism must come to terms with, in a rural society like Ireland, and what we are trying to do is to link this very powerful tradition to the concept of international proletarian revolution.<sup>36</sup>

He was extremely aware, then, of the Irish land wars and consciously sought to use this history, along with its urban applications, to push the people to apply their nationalist vigor to the socialist cause.

As they changed the nationalist view of history to fit into their socialist view of history, the PD leaders also adopted the republican impulses for violence for their own cause. Connolly had written in 1910 of his dissatisfaction with political solutions compared to the effectiveness of more militant efforts. He believed, "political remedies proposed [are] unrelated to the social

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<sup>35</sup> Gibbon, "Religion and Class," 8-12.

<sup>36</sup> Baxter et. al., "PD Militants discuss Strategy," 38.

subjection at the root of the matter. The revolutionists of the past were wiser.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, he made open rebellion seem the intelligent, logical thing to do. PD leaders directly argued, “Connolly had realized when the war [for establishing a Workers Republic] started that a physical blow must be struck against Imperialism.”<sup>38</sup> Thus, the PD argued for the necessity of a “physical” response. Yet, the PD writers also criticized Connolly for compromising with the IRB nationalists who only wanted to overthrow the British instead of abolishing elitist rule even among the Irish, by participating in the Easter Rising. They argued that modern times demonstrated that the nationalist struggle was insufficient and they used the 1916 example to sway readers against sectarian divisions within the working class. They also hinted at the danger of totally supporting nationalist rebel groups, like the modern IRA. As seen in chapter two, they viewed violence as an ingrained part of Irish culture. Farrell even said, “Bourgeois democracy and the national state are recent developments in Ireland and their traditions do not run deep, in contrast to the tradition of armed insurrection, of revolution as a means.”<sup>39</sup> However, instead of promoting this violence as a traditional response to sectarian oppression, the PD now hoped to harness social violence to inspire a workers’ revolution. Thus, as they turned to socialism the PD crystallized their views on violence. They saw the necessity of physical force; however, they wanted to use violence in the defense of the entire working class, not just the Catholic minority. Still, like Connolly, the PD found this ideal easier to preach than practice. Their refusal to compromise with the nationalists proved complicated and their goal of recruiting Protestant workers nearly impossible, especially as they proved unable to overcome sectarianism even within their own organization.

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<sup>37</sup> Connolly, *Labour and Irish History*, 169.

<sup>38</sup> People's Democracy (PD). *Free Citizen: Newspaper of the People's Democracy*, .2. no. 27, Weekly, (Belfast: PD, April 9, 1971) CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/PD\\_Free\\_Citizen\\_090471r.jpg](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/PD_Free_Citizen_090471r.jpg).

<sup>39</sup> Baxter et. al., “PD Militants discuss Strategy,” 38.

PD's Failure to Overcome Sectarianism:

In 1973, Paul Arthur, a Queen's University professor and a rising PD leader, sought to explain the PD's failure to transcend sectarianism through creating a socialist movement. His analysis was fairly critical of the former PD leaders, casting them as a youthful group incapable of adapting their ideals to the current situation. He first quoted Dr. Conor Cruise O'Brien, a socialist politician at the time in the Republic. This is an interesting choice. A PD pamphlet had once used O'Brien as a punch line, saying "everyone's a socialist nowadays, even ... Conor Cruise"<sup>40</sup> Regardless, Arthur quoted O'Brien as saying:

Now I think it is likely that these young people will find as the civil rights struggle develops, that religion is more important than they thought it was, and that historically formed suspicions and animosities are not quite so easy to dispel - even in themselves -as they now assume.<sup>41</sup>

Arthur then followed with his own analysis: "In the year following the formation of a PD committed to revolutionary socialism, it became clear that it would not face up to this problem; in fact it can be seen that it could not altogether dispel historical animosities in itself."<sup>42</sup> He dismissed them as "arrogant," saying the PD failed because "it lacked the ability to criticize itself." He concluded that because of this failure, the PD "might manage to struggle on for some time to come but it had condemned itself to the limbo world occupied by radical student movements elsewhere."<sup>43</sup> Thus, both Arthur and O'Brien stressed the members' youthfulness and student background as well as ascribing to the leaders the weakness of being incapable of self-examination.

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<sup>40</sup>People's Democracy (PD), Dublin Branch. "Provisionals," *Unfree Citizen*. (Dublin: PD, December 10, 1971), reprinted in *People's Democracy: What it stands for, its Attitudes*, (Dublin: PD, February 1972), 8. CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_standsfor\\_0272r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_standsfor_0272r.pdf).

<sup>41</sup> Conor Cruise O'Brien, no original citation given, in Paul Arthur, *The People's Democracy 1968-1973*. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974) Conclusion, no pagination, CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/arthur74c.htm#conclusion>.

<sup>42</sup> Paul Arthur, *The People's Democracy 1968-1973*. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974) Conclusion, no pagination, CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/arthur74c.htm#conclusion>.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

This is perhaps too harsh a view of the PD and its leaders, who demonstrated their ability to engage in self-reflection and examination of the situation in Ireland. This is apparent through their development after the Long March, with both McCann and Devlin writing autobiographies about mistakes and new strategies.<sup>44</sup> Their extensive use of history shows a deep understanding of the roots of the conflict and their intentional ideological shift after the Long March shows their attempts to adjust to new circumstances. However, Arthur's work does point out that circumstances were hard. The PD leaders struggled to decide on a strategy while the violence of the situation pressured them to act quickly. Whatever they might have done differently, they did in fact fail to overcome sectarianism.

Arthur also cited O'Brien's criticism of the PD's historical understanding. O'Brien referred cynically to the PD as "those who think it sufficient to conjure with the names of Tone and Connolly and pretend that ... these names will in the present circumstances bring members of the Protestant and Catholic communities together."<sup>45</sup> Arthur then paraphrased O'Brien's next point:

Slogans of this kind coming from Catholic ghettos in the North might be subjectively non-sectarian and socio-revolutionary but to most Protestants in the North including the Protestant working class they remained repellent and suggestive of attempted Catholic dominance.<sup>46</sup>

Again, this may be overly harsh, taking the PD's efforts out of context by dismissing their evolving struggle to find a balanced strategy. However, it does show how the PD's use of history acted as a double-edged sword. While it served to connect them to the socialist history of the land and imperial oppression, it also led them dangerously close to sectarianism. The PD, in Arthur's eyes, failed to woo Protestant working class support to their cause specifically because

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<sup>44</sup>; Eamonn McCann, *War on an Irish Town*. 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, (original 1974), (Penguin Books Limited: London 1993); Bernadette Devlin, *Price of My Soul*. (London: Pan Books Ltd, 1969).

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

of their youth and rhetorical use of history, which only exacerbated the roots of sectarianism.<sup>47</sup> Even though McCann saw this coming in 1969, the PD was unable to avoid alienating the Protestants in an attempt to solidify their largely Catholic base.

The PD also faced a problem applying their socialist theory to real circumstances as it related to the land. Anthropologist Allen Feldman writes extensively about the concept of geographical space as it relates to the culture of violence in Ireland. Like Connolly and Gibbon, Feldman claims that “space itself functioned as a mnemonic artifact that stored repertoires of historical narratives and collective action.”<sup>48</sup> The Irish people have a deep connection to the land as a reminder of their history and a grounding of their culture. The unionist and nationalist sects have also over time set up a “demarcation of social space” in which each claims certain areas as their own and they preserve these rights by both taking up physical residences and regular, ceremonial commemorations in the spaces.<sup>49</sup> Because of this preservation of history, Feldman argues that violence takes on a new dynamic in the Irish context. He claims that the way people discuss and ritualize an event affects the way they remember it and the way they fit it into their view of the conflict.<sup>50</sup> For example, the Easter Rising of 1916 was at first condemned by most nationalists as a foolhardy waste of life. Then, however, the executions of the survivors and their commemoration by poets like WB Yeats led to their elevation to the status of martyrs. Thus, Feldman argues that to grasp the full power of violence as a symbolic act of sectarianism, one must acknowledge the history of sectarian violence in Ireland, not as it happened but as the people remember it.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 27.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid. 20.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. 21.

Using the work of Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon, and Henry Patterson, Feldman relates violence to the civil rights marches. He states that in Ireland, “marches in particular meant... the assertion of territorial sectarian claims. To march in or through an area is to lay claim to it.”<sup>52</sup> Therefore, when so many areas were endowed with historical, as well as “confessional” significance, even the non-sectarian civil rights marches led to “territorial transgressions.”<sup>53</sup> The wrong sect laying claim to the wrong area provoked outrage. The PD had already experienced this in the Long March when they invaded Derry, sparking the unionists to remember the Siege of Derry from 1689 and the nationalists to establish Free Derry in order to protect their own traditional neighborhoods. These responses baffled international onlookers as extreme, yet their historical context helps to explain these actions. The Protestants were offended because the civil rights marchers violated land they held to be sacred. The Catholics went on the defense so readily because they were aware that Protestants had forcibly taken their land. In her maiden speech to Parliament, in April of 1969, Devlin referenced the power of geographical space in defining the conflict in Northern Ireland. She argued:

How can we say that we are a non-sectarian movement and are for the rights of both Catholics and Protestants when, clearly, we are beaten into the Catholic areas? Never have we been beaten into the Protestant areas. When the students marched from Belfast to Derry, there was a predominant number of Protestants. The number of non-Catholics was greater than the number of Catholics. Nevertheless, we were still beaten into the Catholic area because it was in the interests of the minority and the Unionist Party to establish that we were nothing more than the Catholic uprising.<sup>54</sup>

Thus, the PD struggled to escape the historical divisions the land suggested.

During the Battle of the Bogside this spatial division increased. On August 7, 1969 the

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<sup>52</sup> Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon, and Henry Patterson, “The State in Northern Ireland: Political Forces and Social Class” (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1979), 171, quoted in Allen Feldman, *Formations of Violence: The Narrative of the Body and Political Terror in Northern Ireland*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 21.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Bernadette Devlin, “Maiden Speech” (April 22 1969), *Proceeding of the House of Commons*, (London: Hansard Archive, 1969), 282-83.



*Irish Times* of Dublin placed on its front page “Families Quit Hostile Areas of Belfast.”<sup>55</sup> The Dubliners were concerned that these areas would never return to normal and would add “additional irritant to the already inflamed situation.”<sup>56</sup> Such fears were justifiable as the tightening of the sides geographically caused a tightening of sectarian purposes. Indeed, Feldman reports that “lasting for more than a year, these relocations have been evaluated as one of the largest movements of the civilian populations in postwar Europe.”<sup>57</sup> As a result, both sides set up militant defensive forces to keep both non-violent marchers and sectarian fighters out.

The PD also faced difficulties balancing ideology with practicality when it came to their attempt to avoid aligning themselves with nationalist groups, specifically the IRA. Their words on this relationship show an intricate, evolving partnership between the two groups. On the one hand, the PD was constantly and openly critical of the Republican’s narrow agenda. However, as time went on, they increasingly looked to the IRA out of necessity, emphasizing the two groups’ shared goals. Even in the immediate aftermath of the Long March, it was clear that the PD acknowledged some practical need for the IRA. Like the rest of the population, they needed protection and the IRA was the only force willing to give it to them. Thus, when the PD joined with NICRA to lead several other marches that spring in Newry and Belfast, most members of the IRA in Belfast marched with them. As historian Brian Hanley observes, while these IRA men were intended only “to act as stewards” they also led the rioting when the marchers were told to disband or reroute by the RUC.<sup>58</sup> It seems that after Burntollet, the PD wished to come more prepared and were no longer willing to change their course to keep their demonstrations civil. In these spring marches and in other demonstrations, therefore, “IRA activity continued in tandem

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<sup>55</sup> “Families Quit Hostile Areas in Belfast” *The Irish Times*. (Dublin) August 7, 1969. 1.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> Feldman, *Formations of Violence*, 23.

<sup>58</sup> Brian Hanley and Scott Millar, *The Lost Revolution: the Story of the Official IRA and the Workers’ Party*. (Dublin: Penguin Ireland, 2009). 109.

with street politics.”<sup>59</sup>

The PD may also have built bridges to be IRA because the IRA although clearly a nationalist organization, was also becoming increasingly socialist. Its leader Cathal Goulding directed this shift. In an interview from August 1970, he discussed the changes in the IRA’s structure and goals. His description of the army’s structure showed it to be similar to the PD’s structure, with regular meetings, a popular voting system, and relatively fluid, open leadership. Because of its structure of direct accountability to the people, Goulding claimed that the IRA’s, “military organization [wa]s basically a workers’ army... in which the working class and the small farmers have a say in policy.”<sup>60</sup> The two organizations primarily differed in their method. Goulding responded to a question about the relationship between a national and socialist revolution by saying:

I think that in the future ... the fight to establish national independence must develop toward a fight to establish the ordinary people in the ownership of Ireland... Therefore, at some stage the struggle for national liberation must develop toward the establishment of the people in ownership of Ireland, that is, toward a struggle to establish a socialist republic.<sup>61</sup>

Thus, the IRA’s approach was to begin with a nationalist rebellion and gradually, even naturally, move into a socialist revolution. This strategy may have had some appeal for the PD and it shows some similarities to Farrell’s strategy of utilizing Catholic force. However, fundamentally, the PD disagreed. The group’s documents show a fear that, like in 1916, throwing out Britain and even the loyalists would only lead to a new elitist regime of Irishmen, a threat that Goulding refused to acknowledge. Still, the PD grew to accept that Goulding’s approach might have been more practical, since nationalism could inspire revolutionaries more effectively than socialist

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid. 110.

<sup>60</sup> Cathal Goulding, “Interview with Cathal Goulding Chief of Staff, Official IRA (19 August 1970),” *Ireland in Rebellion*, ed. Gerry Foley (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1971) 20-25, in *Bigotry and Blood: Documents on the Ulster Troubles*, ed. Charles Carlton. (Chicago: Nelson-Hall, 1977) 111.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid. 108-9.

theory. McCann lamented in 1969:

We have failed to get our position across. We keep saying parrot-like that we are fighting on working class issues for working class unity, that our objective is a workers' and farmers' socialist republic. But when you say to the people in the Bogside area in Derry that they are being exploited because they are workers not because they are Catholics, they are not very inclined to believe you...The consciousness of the people is still most definitely sectarian.<sup>62</sup>

Therefore, the PD struggled to find a balance between what was practical and what their ideals called for. They clearly saw sectarianism embedded into the people after the Long March and by the end of 1969 they also saw their socialist ideals failing to lead the people in a new direction. When Cathal Goulding mixed the two ideals with his philosophy, the PD may have gravitated toward supporting him. Thus the PD, though critical of the IRA for their focus on nationalism first, maintained what one scholar refers to as "friendly relations" with "PD shops" set up next to buildings where Republican Clubs met.<sup>63</sup>

*Pressure of Internment and the Allure of the Provisional IRA:*

When internment began, however, the stakes were raised yet again and the PD adapted their views and their language. In 1971, fifteen PD members were interned, including Michael Farrell, and many more were forced into hiding.<sup>64</sup> As the PD Manifesto of 1972 states, the PD switched to support the Provisional IRA.<sup>65</sup> This branch did not make the same socialist claims as Goulding did, who remained with the Official IRA. However, by December 1971, the PD perceived the Official IRA as without "teeth," failing to develop their socialist ideology in any practical way and caught up in frivolous political matters.<sup>66</sup> For example, the PD mocked the

<sup>62</sup> Baxter et. al., "PD Militants discuss Strategy," 38.

<sup>63</sup> Hanley and Millar, *The Lost Revolution*. 206.

<sup>64</sup> Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*. (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 282.

<sup>65</sup> People's Democracy Dublin, "Provisionals" 8.

<sup>66</sup> People's Democracy Dublin, "The Officials," 12.

Officials' championing of "anglers" when they should have focused on working fishermen.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile the Provisional IRA developed a reputation as the more energized, effective group. The PD had always criticized other groups for their indirect approach and prided themselves on their bold directness. They had led the movement forward, refusing to settle and intensifying the fight for civil rights. Perhaps, they saw the same aggressiveness and idealism in the relatively youthful leaders of the Provisionals. Either way, scholars claim that "by late 1971, the fracture was complete, with the PD pulling out of NICRA and helping establish the Provo-supporting Northern Resistance Movement."<sup>68</sup>

Still, even with an acceptance of the Provisional IRA, the PD leaders continued to exhibit ambivalence about their strategy of violence. While the Provisionals began as the defenders of Catholic neighborhoods, they soon switched to taking offensive, terrorist action. They sought to bring devastation in Northern Ireland and Britain in the hope that Westminster would see the situation as hopeless and move out of Northern Ireland. The PD never openly accepted this strategy. However, one early document shows that they themselves might have had similar ideas. One of their newspaper articles quotes the 1916 martyr Sean McDermott who said:

The best way to make headway is to agitate on issues, which directly affect us the workers. Riots do not provide the essential question, how does one oppose British Imperialism? Obviously one can only meet force with force and it is up to us to defend ourselves against the willful murders and looters of the British Army but the place to hit the 'bosses' is in their pockets, this can be done in many ways...<sup>69</sup>

Thus, it seems the PD leaders were at least open to the idea of attacking the material manifestations of capitalism. Perhaps they were even open to the idea of bombing businesses in the hopes that businessmen would see Ireland as an unstable investment and leave. Still though,

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid. 11.

<sup>68</sup> Hanley and Millar. *The Lost Revolution*. 206.

<sup>69</sup> People's Democracy (PD). *West Belfast Newsheet*, (Belfast: PD, 1972?), 1. CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/PD\\_West\\_Belfast\\_120170r.jpg](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/periodical/PD_West_Belfast_120170r.jpg).

the PD continued their rhetorical strategy of supporting violence for the cause of socialism, not nationalism. Much later, the PD placed a poster in London headed “THE CAUSE OF LABOUR IS THE CAUSE OF IRELAND...THE CAUSE OF IRELAND IS THE CAUSE OF LABOUR.” At the bottom of this poster they included a quote from Karl Marx, which reads, “it is in the direct interest of the English working class to get rid of their present connection with Ireland.”<sup>70</sup> Therefore, it appears that the PD too hoped to persuade the British that Ireland was detrimental to their own progression and simply not worth saving. However, hanging a poster is a lot different than planting car bombs, as the Provisional IRA had done in March 1973.

Thus, the PD sought to reach an accommodation with sectarian pressures after the Long March. The leaders consolidated their organization into a strongly left winged, socialist group. Through establishing a Workers Republic, they hoped to transcend the sectarian violence and injustices that had endured in Ireland for centuries. However, even with this new, determined approach, they still struggled to overcome sectarian violence. They fought amongst themselves, made ideological concessions in an attempt to hold on to their popularity and influence amongst the general public, and became increasingly open in their support for republican paramilitaries. These concessions all failed to achieve their purpose though and by the mid seventies the PD had become an obscure, minor contributor to the political scene. They had also lost their vision of effectively establishing socialist principles in Northern Ireland.

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<sup>70</sup> Poster Collective, *The Cause of Labour Is...* (London: PD, 1974), CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011, [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/posters/thepostercollective/the\\_cause\\_of\\_labour\\_r.jpg](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/images/posters/thepostercollective/the_cause_of_labour_r.jpg).

## Conclusion

The People's Democracy rose and fell in a crucial time of Irish history when the Civil Rights Movement ended and the Troubles began. The organization played a key role in this turning point and its example epitomizes the failure of civil rights in Northern Ireland. Sectarian history had divided Irish society for centuries. The majority of the people associated with one of two sects, either Catholic nationalists or Protestant unionists. They constantly felt under pressure to struggle against one another, both in politics and on the streets. In the 1960s, civil rights activists sought to change the basis of this struggle. They staged non-violent, public demonstrations to attract attention to the deep discrimination in Irish society against the Catholic minority. However, they sought to avoid sectarianism by emphasizing unity for all lower class people and by appealing to Westminster as British citizens.

As civil rights activists started to influence their society and spread their message across the world, the political leaders from both sects began to make changes. Prime Minister Terrence O'Neill led the unionist politicians at Stormont on a path toward gradually lessening discrimination and bringing all the advantages of the Labour Party's programs from Westminster to Northern Ireland. The nationalists began to turn from violence on the border, to support breaking into the political sphere with Republican Clubs, and to support civil rights by directly joining in the marches. Even the IRA began to officially change its ideology under Cathal Goulding to promote socialist ideas popular with the Labour Party and many civil rights organizations. However, extremists from all sides started a backlash against these changes. Many nationalists saw O'Neill's reforms as too little too late. They saw the IRA's new emphasis on politics and peace as selling out the cause of a united republic, and they worried about the defense of their communities. Meanwhile, the unionist extremists under Reverend Ian Paisley

worried that concessions to civil rights activists would endanger their authority and, consequently, Protestant safety in Northern Ireland. Therefore, as the 1960s neared an end, sectarian violence was on the rise again as the population became increasingly disillusioned with the promises of change and angry at the types of changes that were happening.

The PD consisted of young radicals who wanted more and better reform. They defied the truce between Stormont and NICRA and led the Long March in January 1969 to protest what they saw as O'Neill's meager reform promises. They met with staunch opposition on the road from local loyalists and the RUC and the march exploded into violence and sectarian rioting.

After this experience, the PD changed dramatically. The members began to support violence as a means to accomplish civil rights. They became convinced that because of the country's violent history, the people would always turn instinctively to violence when threatened. The PD leaders sought to harness this power, though, for their own cause, which soon became tied up in socialist ideals. Unlike the loosely socialist reforms suggested earlier in the decade, the PD members called for a Workers Republic, free of any imperialist or upper class influence, including British. They hoped this radical call for change would allow them to transcend sectarianism. However, its subversive message appealed to extreme Catholic nationalists and it frightened Protestant unionists, who focused more on the call to separate from England than on anything else in the message. The PD members could not escape sectarian history and violence and bring their socialist agenda to the forefront of the conflict. Even if they had been able to overcome the deep divide in the mass population, they would still have been undermined by the subtle sectarian viewpoints among themselves.

By the time internment was fully underway in 1973, the PD was firmly allied with the nationalist side. It continued to be identified as a left wing, socialist group tied to republicanism

and fought for prisoners' rights throughout the 1970s. Yet, the PD never again achieved the same prominence in Northern Ireland as it had in 1969. Its membership continued to decrease as its leaders separated to become independent politicians or Sinn Fein members. In the 1980s, the members voted twice to dissolve and merge with Sinn Fein, though each time a minority held out and kept the independent party going. This group trended toward a return to Belfast students focused solely on ideals and divorced from any real involvement in practical action. The PD became small and ineffective, occupying "the limbo world occupied by radical student movements elsewhere."<sup>1</sup> It finally dissolved completely in the mid 1990s, though the contemporary Socialist Democracy, a small organization in Belfast, which promotes international socialism, claims the PD as its predecessor. Many of the PD's early leaders, including Michael Farrell, Eamonn McCann, and Bernadette Devlin, became established socialist thinkers and are humanitarian leaders still today. Their writings show that they look back on their time in the PD as a time of maturation, however, it is clearly portrayed as an organization of their past.

Thus, the PD failed to bring about change in Northern Ireland, either for civil rights or for socialism. Its example demonstrates the deep effect sectarian violence had on eroding the Civil Rights Movement as a whole. The PD's struggle to fit an ideology that transcended sectarianism with an effective, practical strategy as they expanded in power and then lost control over their base demonstrates that sectarian violence was negotiated and engaged with in complicated, changing ways before the Civil Rights Movement finally succumbed to it. I think the sectarian tensions at the time in Northern Ireland were insurmountable. The next generation of leaders, represented by the PD leaders especially, were still willing to endure and commit more violence

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<sup>1</sup> Paul Arthur. *The People's Democracy 1968-1973*. (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1974). Conclusion, no pagination. CAIN, accessed April 18, 2011. <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/arthur74.htm>.



instead of creating and accepting a compromising peace. Furthermore, even if peace had been possible at this time, I think the PD's focus on Irish history did not help them overcome sectarianism. Easter 1916 had proven the stronger allure of nationalism over socialism in explaining Irish history. McCann was right in saying they had not educated the people and set up effective, local organizations.<sup>2</sup> The majority would not embrace socialism over nationalism as the backing force behind the popular movement, which swept the PD away. The group certainly had to compromise and come away from its ideals in order to have an impact on society. If they had kept their ideals and strategies theoretical and disassociated themselves from the Provisional IRA, they could not have inspired people to march or fight against internment. Indeed, their later history shows the diehard idealists of the group becoming irrelevant. But in their using of history to attempt to explain changing their ideals to fit a practical strategy, they compromised themselves and failed to get their transcendent perspective across.

They focused on their own change from innocents to realists through their experience of violence and on Irish socialist history in order to explain their changing acceptance of violence. Yet, this approach undermined their attempts to transcend sectarianism. The PD sought to reach an accommodation with sectarian violence when they saw violence was unavoidable, yet their explanation of this accommodation failed to hold. Their ideals did not fit with their practical needs and this tension caused the group to eventually disintegrate.

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<sup>2</sup> Liam Baxter, et. al., "PD Militants Discuss Strategy," (April 20, 1969), in *Explosion in Ulster*. (London: PD, 1969), 34-42. CAIN accessed April 18, 2011. [http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd\\_explosion\\_69r.pdf](http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/ephemera/pamphlet/pd_explosion_69r.pdf).

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