



(left) Banner depicting King William at the Battle of the Boyne (1690), Orange Order parade at Coleraine, 12 July 2008

(right) Entrance to the Bogside, a Catholic quarter in Derry, 10 July 2008

‘The Troubles’ Civil Strife in Northern Ireland



Terms and Aims

The Catholic Side

The ultimate aim of the politically more active Catholics is the reunion of Northern Ireland with the Republic of Ireland. Therefore, the terms ‘Republican’ and ‘Nationalist’ represent the Catholic side.

The Protestant Side

The ultimate aim of the politically more active Protestants is to keep the status quo – the union of Northern Ireland with Great Britain, the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK). Therefore, the terms ‘Unionist’ and ‘Loyalist’ represent the Protestant side.

The Fundamental Problem

The more radical Catholics demand(ed) the union of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, irrespective of the fact that the Catholics only represent a minority in Northern Ireland.

The more radical Protestants see/saw Republicanism as a direct threat to their way of life, so they refuse(d) to make any political concessions whatsoever.

Neither side was willing to give in. The result was a political deadlock, which was further aggravated by acts of violence and counter-violence.

The Two Tribes

The problem Northern Ireland faces is to reconcile the two Irish tribes – the Catholic tribe, which represents the majority in the island as a whole but the minority in the North, and the Protestant tribe, of which the reverse is true. Both, however, are Irish tribes.

‘Ireland has been a Catholic country since Saint Patrick began to convert the Celtic Irish tribes to Catholicism in the 5th century. The Protestants arrived in Ireland in the 16th and 17th century. Their ancestry makes them Irish as well.

Most of the people living inside the cultures of these two tribes seem unable to move outside their historic fears, prejudices and loyalties. That has been equally true of most political leaders on both sides. Politicians who lose the imprint of their tribal culture are usually rejected by their tribes, thereby condemning themselves to repeat in each generation the bloody disputes of the past.

There can be no political settlement until there is a reconciliation of these tribes. So long as they hate each other and wish to humiliate each other, no political solution is possible.’

(Adapted from William Rees-Mogg, in: *The Independent*, 12 November 1990)

In 1998 the Belfast Agreement was signed by politicians of both sides, thereby initiating a peace process at last. Despite difficulties and setbacks, a first general election to a Northern Ireland assembly was held in 2003. At present, leaders of Protestant and Catholic parties share power. ‘The Troubles’ appear to be over at last, although deeply rooted fears, prejudices and mistrust on both sides may take longer to disappear.

[**reconcile v:** restore friendly relations; **tribe n:** distinctive social group; **ancestry n:** ethnic origin; **prejudice n:** ‘Vorurteil’; **imprint n:** mark; **humiliate v:** make sb feel ashamed and foolish; **initiate v:** start; **assembly n:** parliament]

[**irrespective of adj:** not taking into account; **deadlock n:** situation in which no progress can be made; **aggravate v:** make worse]



Saint Patrick

There is not enough historical evidence to describe Patrick's life with certainty. It appears that he acted as a missionary in Ireland in the second half of the 5th century. By the 8th century he had become Ireland's patron saint. According to tradition, Patrick banished snakes from Ireland. He is also credited with explaining the concept of trinity to the Irish by showing them the shamrock, the three-leaved clover. St Patrick's day is celebrated on March 17.



King William of Orange

In 1660 Catholic James II had become king of England. In 1688 he was replaced in the "Glorious Revolution" by William of Orange, a Dutch Protestant married to James's daughter Mary.

James did not surrender his claim to the throne. In 1690 the Protestant army of William of Orange decisively defeated the Catholic army of James II in the Battle of the Boyne north of Dublin. Protestantism in Ireland had been saved. William later became King William III. To this day King William is revered as a great hero and saviour by the Irish Protestants.

The Troubles

Irish History until Partition (1922)

Celts and Catholics

The first settlers reached Ireland around 8000 BC after the end of the last glacial period. During the Iron Age the Celts conquered Ireland, arriving in several waves from the 8th to the 1st century BC. Celtic rule of Ireland gradually led to the development of five major provinces ruled by a king. From the 9th century onwards a High King reigned over Ireland.

In the fifth century the first missionaries arrived in Ireland to convert the Celtic tribes to Catholicism. Saint Patrick – now Ireland's patron saint – supposedly reached Ireland in 432. Eventually, the druid tradition of the Celts collapsed in the face of the new religion and Ireland became a Catholic island. Monasteries flourished in the centuries that followed, producing religious works of art like the Book of Kells.

Viking Raids

From the 9th century onward waves of Viking raiders plundered Irish towns and monasteries. Vikings also founded a number of major Irish towns such as Dublin, Cork or Limerick.

The English Arrive

Fighting among Irish clans led to the arrival of Norman lords. Invited by one Irish king, who hoped to regain his throne with English help, King Henry II was the first English king to set foot in Ireland (1172). Some Gaelic kings accepted Henry as their overlord so that the Normans and their Irish allies eventually ruled large parts of Ireland. In the 14th and 15th century, however, English influence in Ireland gradually decreased.

Plantation – Protestant Settlers Arrive

In the middle of the 15th century England again increased its influence in Ireland. The so-called "plantation" began – the settlement of thousands of British citizens – many of them of Scottish descent – on Irish soil. The Irish natives previously working the land were pushed ever further westwards.

The plantation had serious consequences for the future development of Ireland. Following the break with Catholic Rome and the Reformation in England, the new settlers were Protestants. Eventually, the Protestants would form a majority in some areas, especially in Ulster, the north eastern province. Furthermore, English gradually became the dominant language spoken in Ireland, pushing Gaelic towards the fringes in western Ireland.

[**patron saint n:** the protecting saint; **flourish v:** develop in a positive way; **descent n:** the origin of a person in terms of nationality; **fringe n:** the outmost part; **unprecedented adj:** never seen before; **blight n:** plant disease caused by fungi, 'Brand'; **famine n:** extreme scarcity of food; **malnutrition n:** lack of proper food; **diaspora n:** the dispersion of a people from its homeland; **administer v:** govern; **partition n:** division into parts]

[**trinity n:** the Christian God as three persons: Father, Son and the Holy Spirit; **clover n:** 'Kleeblatt';

The Great Famine (1845-1852)

The introduction of the potato had led to an unprecedented growth of population in Ireland. In the mid-19th century the potato crop failed almost completely for three years in a row (1845-47), due to a fungal disease called the potato blight. The disease caused the potato crop to fail in other European countries as well but only in Ireland it led to mass starvation. Many Irish peasants depended almost exclusively on potatoes, many of them were simply too poor to buy sufficient quantities of other food. Furthermore, English landlords kept exporting large amounts of food (wheat and meat) during the starvation, continuing to make money rather than feed the hungry.

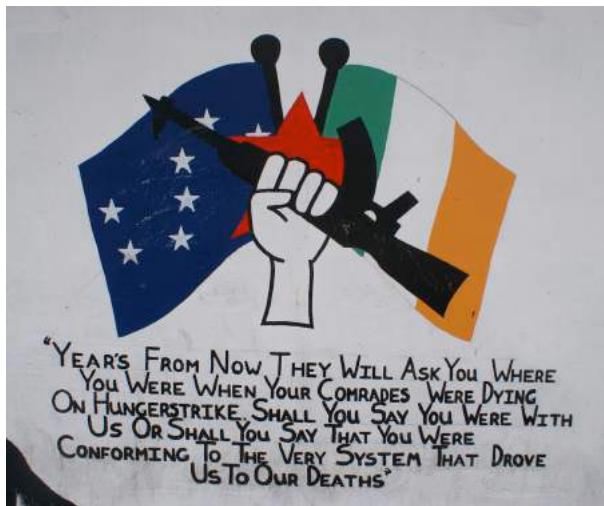
It is unclear how many people lost their lives during the famine. It is assumed that up to one million people died from starvation and diseases brought about by malnutrition. An additional one million Irish left their starving country, most of them emigrating to America. It was the beginning of the Irish diaspora.

The War of Independence and the Partition of Ireland (1922)

In 1801 Ireland was officially united with Great Britain. It was administered by the English parliament in Westminster. Irish nationalists kept struggling for "Home Rule", a status of autonomy, which was repeatedly rejected by London.

Encouraged by Great Britain's costly involvement in the First World War, Irish nationalists attempted a rising on Easter 1916. It failed, however. After the war tensions between the Irish and British led to an armed conflict, called the War of Independence by the Irish. Neither side proved powerful enough to achieve a decisive victory, however. Thus, after much bloodshed, a compromise was reached – the partition of Ireland. In the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1922 26 of the 32 counties became independent, forming the Irish Free State, which became the Republic of Ireland in 1949. Most importantly, however, the province of Ulster remained British.

The British government wanted to keep Ulster because the majority of its population were Protestant and loyal to the English crown and secondly because Northern Ireland was the industrial centre of Ireland. For instance, the Titanic had been built in a Belfast shipyard.



The Radical Catholics

The IRA (Irish Republican Army) was by far the most important Catholic paramilitary organisation. Founded in the early 20th century and come back alive in the 1960s, the IRA started a campaign of terror, believing that only violence would help them reach their goals. The central aim of the IRA was the reunion of Ulster with the Republic of Ireland. Therefore they fought a war against Protestant groups as well as the British Army, who they regarded as the military arm of the oppressor – London.



The Radical Protestants

When the IRA started its bombing campaign in the early 1970s, some radical Protestants took up arms to defend Ulster against the Republicans. The UDA (Ulster Defence Association) and the UVF (Ulster Volunteer Force) were the most prominent among the Protestant paramilitary groups.

Many Unionist murals commemorate the Battle of the Somme during World War One when about 5,000 soldiers from Ulster were killed. Many Protestants believe that Ulster performed a blood sacrifice for Great Britain on that day, and that London is therefore obliged to protect the Protestant way of life in Northern Ireland.

The Troubles

'The Troubles'

Northern Ireland – A Divided Society

The partition of Ireland and the foundation of a Northern Ireland province as a part of the United Kingdom created a divided society in Ulster. Roughly two thirds of the population were Protestants, about one third were Catholics. The religious and social division eventually led to political discrimination and social injustice. Following the decline of the British Empire after the end of the Second World War, Northern Ireland's industrial base was hit hard by severe economic depression.

Unemployment was high, especially among the Catholic working class of Belfast. Protestants were less affected by the economic crisis because they were given the vast majority of government jobs. The animosity between the two 'tribes' was aggravated by the fact that the Protestant majority refused to make any political concessions or to share power. Furthermore, most members of the Royal Constabulary of Ulster (RUC) – the Northern Ireland police force – were Protestants.

'The Troubles' Begin

The actual 'Troubles' – the violent struggle between Catholic and Protestant paramilitary groups and between Catholic paramilitary groups and the British Army – did not start until the late 1960s.

Discrimination and unemployment led to civil rights marches conducted by Catholics, inspired by the civil rights movement of the African Americans in the USA. These peaceful demonstrations were repeatedly attacked by radical Protestants, leading to rioting and sectarian violence in various Northern Ireland towns.

To stop the violence and protect the Catholics, London sent troops to Ulster. Initially, the British Army was welcomed by the Catholics but gradually they lost Catholic support because parts of it proved partial, favouring the Protestant side.

Terrorism – IRA and UDA/UVF

In the early 1970s the IRA – by far the most powerful Catholic paramilitary organisation – embarked on a strategy of terror. The IRA was convinced that only the use of violence would enable them to achieve their goals: to make the British Army leave Northern Ireland and force a union between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Not surprisingly, the strategy did not work. London refused to give in to what it regarded as terrorists. Additionally, Protestant paramilitary groups such as the UVF or UDA were founded to

[decline n: gradual loss of power etc; animosity n: strong negative feeling, resentment; rioting n: street fighting; sectarian adj: (of an action) carried out because of membership of a particular group; partial adj: favouring one side; embark on v: begin; vicious circle n: 'Teufelskreis'; crucial adj: extremely important; ceasefire n: a (temporary) interruption of an armed conflict; negotiations v: discussion aimed at reaching an agreement; decommission v: make weapons inoperative]

fight against the IRA. A vicious circle of violence and counter-violence began, which proved impossible to break for almost three decades. More than 3,000 people became victims of sectarian killings during the 'Troubles', the IRA being responsible for two thirds of the deaths.

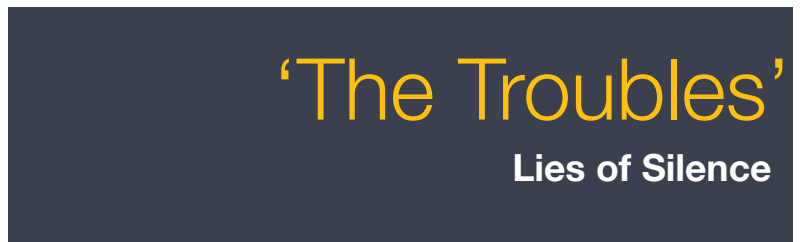
1990s – The Peace Process Begins

In the 1990s most people realised that neither side would ever decisively defeat the other. Some sort of compromise had to be reached. The fundamental problem was that both Catholics and Protestants would have to make crucial concessions. It would require a large amount of mutual trust, which was extremely difficult to do in a climate of fanatic hatred and deep mistrust created by decades of shootings and bombings.

The Catholics would have to accept that the Northern Ireland population would be allowed to vote on whether they wanted to join the Republic of Ireland. They would most likely vote against such a move, given the Protestant majority. The Protestants on the other hand would have to accept that they would have to share political power with the Catholics, that a future Northern Ireland government would be formed by members of both Protestant and Catholic parties. Naturally, all paramilitary groups would have to disband and to destroy their weapons.

A first ceasefire was agreed upon in 1993. A complex series of negotiations started – occasionally interrupted by acts of violence from both sides – between the most important Northern Ireland parties (Sinn Féin – a Republican party led by Gerry Adams – and the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) led by David Trimble) as well as the British government under Prime Minister Tony Blair. It led to the Belfast Agreement (Good Friday Agreement) in 1998, which included the major concessions mentioned above. Also all parties declared to end the violence. The Northern Ireland population accepted the agreement in a referendum.

In 2005 the IRA officially decommissioned all its weapons. Following the latest elections held in 2007, Reverend Ian Paisley of the DUP (Democratic Unionist Party) – the most fanatic Unionist politician, sometimes called the 'Mad Dog of Ulster' – acted as First Minister, with Martin McGuinness – a former IRA leader and member of Sinn Féin – acting as Deputy First Minister. An ironic twist of fate no one would ever have thought possible. Paisley resigned in May 2008.



Bloody Sunday – Derry, 30 January 1972

‘Bloody Sunday’ refers to one of the most notorious incidents of the ‘Troubles’ when members of a British parachute regiment shot dead 14 people during a civil rights march in the Bogside area of Derry.

Background

Civil rights marches and riots had started in many areas of Northern Ireland in the late 1960s. Derry – or Londonderry, as the Unionists called the city – was a major flashpoint of sectarian trouble. Several British soldiers were shot by members of the Provisional IRA – which had broken off from the Official IRA to start a terrorist campaign in order to make the British Army leave Northern Ireland. As violence and counter-violence escalated, marches and protests were banned by the authorities, while the Provisional IRA declared parts of the Bogside – the Catholic working-class area of Derry – as no-go areas for British soldiers or the police. By the end of 1971 almost thirty barricades were in place to protect what the Republicans called Free Derry.

Events of the Day

A Catholic civil rights march on 27 January led to a confrontation between protesters and the 1st Battalion of the British Parachute Regiment outside the Bogside area. At 4 p.m. the soldiers were given the order to enter the Bogside and to use live rounds. Eventually, 27 protesters were shot, 14 people died. The Army claimed that the soldiers had reacted to the threat of guns and nail bombs. All eyewitnesses claimed, however, that the protesters were unarmed and that the soldiers had also fired at fleeing people. As a matter of fact, five victims were shot in the back. The British soldiers received no injuries.

How can the shootings be explained?

In 1998 Prime Minister Tony Blair established an official inquiry into the events. Its findings will not be published before late 2009.

Consequences

The killings in Derry further fuelled the sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, strengthening the position of the Provisional IRA, who considered the British Army to be their mortal enemy and vowed to drive them off the island. The shootings also led to increased recruitment among the IRA, as more young Catholics were willing to take up arms to fight for the Republican cause.

[live round n: ammunition containing an undetonated explosive and a real bullet

The Troubles

U2 - Sunday Bloody Sunday

I can't believe the news today
I can't close my eyes and make it go away.
How long, how long must we sing this song?
How long, how long?
'Cos tonight we can be as one, tonight.

Broken bottles under children's feet
Bodies strewn across the dead-end street.
But I won't heed the battle call
It puts my back up, puts my back up against the wall.

Sunday, bloody Sunday.

And the battle's just begun
There's many lost, but tell me who has won?
The trenches dug within our hearts
And mothers, children, brothers, sisters torn apart.

Wipe the tears from your eyes, wipe your tears away.
I'll wipe your tears away. I'll wipe your tears away.
I'll wipe your bloodshot eyes.
Sunday, bloody Sunday.
Sunday, bloody Sunday.

And it's true we are immune when fact is fiction and TV reality.
And today the millions cry, we eat and drink while tomorrow they die.

The real battle just begun to claim the victory Jesus won on...
Sunday, bloody Sunday
Sunday, bloody Sunday..