PREFACE

The problem of Northern Ireland, which has been plaguing normal life in Britain for the last two decades, is rooted in the centuries old antagonism between the Protestants and the Catholics. During the last half a century, this religious antagonism acquired socio-economic dimensions as well. As a result, since late 1960, Northern Ireland has been plunged into turmoil and turbulence involving not only the people of Northern Ireland but also of Great Britain as a whole, and even of the neighbouring Irish Republic. This has been a standing threat not only to the unity and integrity of the United Kingdom but also to the safety and security of the people of Great Britain. Moreover, the entire exercise has proved, and continues to be very costly in terms of human lives and resources -- a tragic situation that eludes any amicable solution worth the name in the foreseeable future.

The origin of the present problem could be traced to the Government of Ireland Act 1920, which sundered Ireland. Since then, Northern Ireland has been governed continuously by the Protestant-dominated Unionist Party. All these years, the Catholic minority has had little role in the administration of the Province. The Catholics have been discriminated against on many counts. The problem took a serious turn in 1967, when the Civil Rights Association was formed. The Civil Rights Association organised a number of marches in 1968-69. During this period, the Province witnessed bloody riots and brutal killings. Sensing the landslide deterioration in the situation, the British Government placed the Province under the Direct Rule of Westminster in March 1972. Since then the Province has been under the Direct Rule except a brief spell of five months (1 January to 27 May 1974, when it enjoyed a Power-Sharing).

The main objective of this study is to examine the problem of Northern Ireland and analyse the course of events related to it from 1968 to 1982. This has been done with special reference to the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, the role of political parties in Northern Ireland and Britain, and the changing responses of the British and Irish Governments to the problem.

While pursuing this study, I received invaluable help from a number of individuals and institutions. First of all, I would like to acknowledge my debt of gratitude for the unfailing guidance I received at all stages of this study from Dr. B. Vivekanandan, under whose supervision this work has been done.

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