CHAPTER - I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The problem of Northern Ireland, as exemplified by the long and intractable struggle waged through extra-parliamentary means to force the unification of Ireland, has received worldwide attention in recent years. This interminable struggle, with violence as its hallmark, assumes special significance, as it is being carried out against the very country that is known the world over as the mother of democracy, viz. Great Britain. At the present stage, the problem remains almost as insoluble as ever, and continues to pose a grave threat to the unity and integrity of the United Kingdom itself.

Basically, the problem has its roots in the divergent aspirations of the Catholic minority and the Protestant majority regarding the future of Northern Ireland -- the Catholic minority wanted the region to be united with the Irish Republic, while the Protestant majority favoured its continuation as a part of the United Kingdom. The ratio between the Protestants and the Catholics in Northern Ireland is 2:1. The genesis of the problem goes back to the twelfth century, when Henry II invaded Ireland in 1169 and brought part of it under the control of the Anglo-Norman barons. Later, in 1541, Henry VIII (1509-47) took the title of King of Ireland. The annexation of Ireland was further consolidated during the reign of Elizabeth I (1558-1603), when a number of campaigns were mounted to subjugate the Catholic Ireland.  

Subsequently during the period of the Civil War in England (1642-1652), and thereafter, uprisings in Ireland were crushed by Oliver Cromwell, who encouraged colonisation of Ireland by the English and Scottish settlers. The newcomers settled down in Ulster mainly in Antrim and Down, which have been the main bastions of Catholic resistance. Their fervent Protestantism set them apart from the local Roman Catholics and inhibited a natural integration of populations. This was especially true after the victory of the Protestant William of Orange over the Roman Catholic James II at the Battle of Boyne (1690). This trend was reinforced by the passage of the notorious anti-Catholic Penal Laws, which were introduced in the early eighteenth century in Ireland, with a view to keeping Protestants and Catholics away from each other.

The problem of Northern Ireland should, then, be viewed in the context of the intra-Christian conflict between Protestants and Catholics, which left many an indelible scar on the history of many nations in modern

2. The term 'Ulster' (originally composed of nine counties of the old Province, viz. Antrim, Down, Armagh, Derry, Tyrone, Fermagh, Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan) is popularly used in Ireland today to describe two different areas. The first six Counties are a single administrative and political unit which since 1921 has formed the state of Northern Ireland. The remaining three Counties came under the administration of Southern Ireland.


4. T.A. Jackson, ed., Ireland Her Own: An Outline History of the Struggle (London, 1976), pp.82-3. The importance of this battle as a turning point in the history of the Irish struggle is evident from the fact that it is commemorated by the Protestants every year as a symbol of their supremacy.

Europe. As elsewhere in Europe, this conflict assumed great importance in the history of Great Britain. This basic schism became a determinant factor not only in the relationship between England and Ireland but also between the northern and southern parts of Ireland.

In 1782, the Irish Parliament was given legislative independence when the Irish Volunteers demanded 'independence of Irish Parliament' and 'full religious tolerance for their brother Irishmen'. But, Ireland continued to be constitutionally linked with Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland) under the British Crown. The Parliament of Ireland was, however, represented only by the upper classes, mainly of settler origin, who owned most of the agricultural lands, while the native Catholic majority was excluded from it. This situation led to active dissent by the oppressed Catholic majority: "Influenced now by the French Revolution, the United Irishmen developed as a revolutionary movement demanding an independent democratic Republic with full equality for the Catholic majority of the population." Antagonism between the Catholics and the Protestants were still smouldering. With a view to preserving the supremacy of Protestants, a militant Protestant organisation, the Orange Order, was formed in

6. Ibid., p.37.
7. United Irishmen was formed in 1790, by the middle class radicals, largely Presbyterians, with the object of uniting 'the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and dissenter'. Theobald Wolfe Tone was the guiding spirit of this organisation. Ibid., p.38.
9. The Orange Order, which was founded in 1795, became a movement for the labouring and poorer artisan class Protestants. It was a mixture of all kinds of groups: social, secular, religious and political. They came together to create an effective way of maintaining a united spirit among the 'Protestant brethren' from all social classes. Barritt and Carter, n.3, p.46.
1795. Soon after its formation, it started driving out Catholics from North Armagh and South Tyrone.\textsuperscript{10}

After the uprising in 1798, which was led, paradoxically enough, against the British by a group of disgruntled southern Protestants and the Northern Presbyterians (who, like the Catholics, were deprived of effective participation in the political life of the Kingdom and were subjected to pay tithes to the Established ‘Episcopalian’ Church), Ireland lost its Parliament by the Act of Union (1800), which came into force on 1 January 1801.\textsuperscript{11}

When the rebellion was crushed, Britain encouraged the expansion of industry and trade in Ulster, especially Belfast, where linen, engineering and shipbuilding industries flourished under the Union. This was enough to abandon the ideas of ‘nationalism’ and ‘republicanism’, especially for the business class, which by now had become an ardent admirer of the Union due to its economic and commercial interests.

However, by the end of the nineteenth century, there emerged a well-organised movement for Irish Home Rule, which sought self-government in Ireland by constitutional means. And in 1885, the Home Rule Party, led paradoxically by Charles Stewart Parnell (a Protestant landowner), representing the growing Catholic middle class in the South, won 85 seats at Westminster including 17 of the 33 seats in Ulster.\textsuperscript{12} With the Irish nationalists holding the balance of power, a ‘Home Rule’ Bill was introduced in 1886,\textsuperscript{13} by

\textsuperscript{10} Farrell, n.8, p.14.
\textsuperscript{11} David Harkness, \textit{Northern Ireland since 1920} (Dublin, 1983), p.xi.
\textsuperscript{12} Farrell, n.8, p.15.
the Liberal Government under the Premiership of William Ewart Gladstone (1809-1898). The introduction of 'Home Rule' was strongly opposed by the Protestant Unionists, mainly the Ulster businessmen, who also formed an alliance with the Conservative Party in England; and, as if to give substance to the alliance, a leading Conservative, Lord Randolph Churchill, coined the slogan 'Ulster will fight, and Ulster will be right'.

For the Protestants, the 'Home Rule' was virtually a 'Rome Rule'. However, Gladstone's first 'Home Rule' Bill, which provided a 'limited form of self-government', was defeated in the House of Commons. Subsequently, since the nationalist pressure showed no signs of abatement, the second 'Home Rule' Bill was introduced by Gladstone in 1893. This time it was passed in the House of Commons but was defeated in the House of Lords. When Gladstone was drafting his second 'Home Rule' Bill in 1892, a secret society called "Young Ulster" was formed by a young professional engineer Fred Crawford in Belfast to oppose it. Many joined the 'Orange Order' to preserve the Protestant supremacy. Prominent among them was Colonel Saunderson, a former Liberal MP from County Cavan, who was followed by many ex-Liberal businessmen and industrialists.

The Third and final 'Home Rule' Bill was the outcome of the nationalists' pressure, intensified by radical groups like Sinn Fein. After the British general elections in 1910,

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16. Harkness, n.11, p.xii.

17. Farrell, n. 8, p.15.

18. It was founded in 1905 by Arthur Griffith as a Separatist but not as a Republican Party. It was infiltrated by the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and after the 1916 'Rising' it became the main voice of Sinn Fein...
the Liberal Government was dependent on the United Irish League (earlier Home Rule Party), led by John Redmond, for maintaining its majority in the Parliament. Since the Parliament Act of 1911 gave supremacy to the House of Commons over the House of Lords, this paved the way for smooth passage of the third Home Rule Bill.

The ruling party being critically dependent on the support of the United Irish League to remain in power, it introduced on 12 April 1912 the third 'Home Rule' Bill. In order to oppose the imposition of 'Home Rule' in Ireland, an Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF) was formed in January 1913. It was basically a creation of the Ulster Unionist Council, which wanted to set up a provisional government in Ulster under Edward Carson, who armed the UVF with weapons brought from Germany.

The outbreak of the World War-I prevented the immediate implementation of the third 'Home Rule' Bill, which finally gave way to a different arrangement in the post-War period. Meanwhile, in order to counter the arming of UVF, the nationalists in the South recruited people, around the end of 1913, for a force of Irish National

[fn. 18 contd...]

militant Republicanism, advocating boycott of the Westminster Parliament and supporting the IRA armed resistance. Sinn Fein split over the Treaty in 1922, with the anti-Treaty majority keeping the title and adopting an absenteeist policy towards the new Free State Parliament as well. De Valera and his supporters left Sinn Fein in 1926 to set up Fianna Fail Party and entered the Dail, whereas a group of left-wingers broke away in the 1930s to set up the Republican Congress.


Volunteers. Besides, James Connolly, a Marxist revolutionary, had also been recruiting a working-class Irish Citizen Army. These volunteers were controlled jointly by the supporters of the Sinn Fein, members of the secret Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB), and Redmond's United Irish League (UIL).

21. James Connolly (1868-1916) founded the Irish Socialist Republican Party in 1896. He was the organiser of the Belfast Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) from 1911-1913. He involved himself in the great Dublin lock-out of 1913 and in organising the Irish Citizen Army -- a workers' defence force. A convinced Marxist revolutionary, he was in the van of the struggle against the British imperialism and allied with the revolutionary nationalists to organise the 1916 Easter Rising and sign the proclamation of the Republic. Wounded in 1916, he was shot dead by the British authorities on 12 May 1916. Farrell, n. S, p.339.

22. Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) was a revolutionary secret society dedicated to the cause of establishing an Irish Republic by force. Initially it was known as the Fenians. It organised an unsuccessful Rising in 1867, besides a bombing campaign in England. It was re-organised as the IRB in 1873 and eventually infiltrated into the Sinn Fein Party and the Irish Volunteers. It was the IRB, which planned the 1916 Rising and re-organised the Volunteers into the IRA in 1918-1919. Michael Collins was a leading light in the IRB. It is under his influence that it supported the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 and swung much of the IRA behind it. The IRB ceased to have much influence after Collins' death in 1922. Ibid., p.355.

23. United Irish League (UIL) was set up in 1898 as a mass organisation to agitate for land reform. The UIL helped to re-unite the divided Irish Home Rule Party and then provided it with a constituency, organisation and branches. The UIL was effectively the voice of the Irish Catholic middle class and the Church before the World War-I. Mildly reformist on social issues, it was firmly constitutionalist and anti-revolutionary. After 1916, the UIL was swept aside by Sinn Fein everywhere, except in the North, where Joe Devlin and the Ancient Order of Hibernians held it together for a little longer. Some of the Belfast branches were still in existence up to 1925. Ibid., p.20.
When the World War-I broke out, Carson's Ulster Volunteers Force joined hands with the British Army. But the National Volunteers got split on this issue, because Redmond wanted that the Volunteers should join the British Army, while a sizeable minority under Sinn Fein and IRB denounced the Irish participation in the war. Connolly's 'Citizen Army' also took the same attitude.24

The British claim to possess and govern Ireland continued to be challenged, because the nationalists were not satisfied with a limited 'Home Rule' within the British Empire. They wanted an independent Irish Republic. Thus, on Easter Monday in April 1916, a coup was organised mainly by the Citizen Army and Sinn Fein, and engineered by the Irish Republican Brotherhood. They proclaimed an Irish Republic and seized the Centre of Dublin. The purpose of this uprising "was to strike a symbolic blow; the design was not so much for a coup but for a demonstration", and therefore, those who had organised the 1916 Rising made little effort to mobilise larger support for it.25

After a week's fierce fighting the Rising was crushed and the leaders were shot dead. With the suppression of the "Easter Rising", the IRB lost its popular support. Thus, Sinn Fein, which was basically Arthur Griffith's26 organisation, became more popular. In the

24. Ibid.
26. Arthur Griffith (1871-1922), was a journalist, who became the leader of the Sinn Fein. In 1898, he started a newspaper, the United Irishman, but found it difficult to sustain it. After 1906, the paper was renamed as Sinn Fein. Later on, Griffith plunged himself into organising a political revival with a purely Irish dimension. He was not a Republican, but he was certainly a separatist, his ideal solution being a "dual monarchy" for Ireland and England. D.J. Hickey and J.E. Doherty, A Dictionary of Irish History, 1800-1980 (Dublin, 1987), p.210.
general election of 1918, Sinn Fein won 73 out of 105 seats, superceding John Redmond's United Irish League. The Sinn Fein boycotted the Westminster Parliament and severed the British connections. Its members met instead in Dublin in January 1919 and established their Assembly, which was called Dail Eireann. But in Ulster the situation was somewhat different. The Unionists had won 22 out of 37 seats, which ensured them a comfortable position. When the Dail Eireann met for the first time on 21 January 1919, it was not only boycotted by the Unionists but also by Redmond's United Irish League (UIL).

Soon after the declaration of Irish independence the Irish Volunteers took to shooting and violence in County Tipperary. By this time, they were re-organising and re-arming themselves into an Irish Republican Army. The IRA, soon after its formation waged war against the British force, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), in which many RUC men were killed. The IRA, which soon emerged as the military wing of Sinn Fein, had little hold in Ulster, so the violence was confined to the South initially.

PARTITION OF IRELAND AND AFTER

The growing schism between the Protestants and the Catholics forced the British Government to move for a compromise. With a view to resolving the impasse, the British Prime Minister, David Lloyd George, got the Government of Ireland Act, 1920, ratified in the British Parliament. Providing for Home Rule Parliaments in Dublin and Belfast, this Act laid the foundation of the partition of Ireland. 28

27. Wallace, n.14, p.16.
Ireland was partitioned not because anyone wanted it, but because the British Government thought that partition was the only possible way of reconciling -- the two rival groups the Nationalists (mainly Roman Catholics), who demanded self-rule, and the Unionists (mainly Protestants), who wished to remain with the United Kingdom. 29 The Act also provided for a 'Council of Ireland' to link these two. The Council was to consist of 20 representatives from each Parliament, and had the authority to discuss matters of mutual concern. But the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921, signed soon afterwards made the Council of Ireland still-born.

The Government of Ireland Act 1920 could not meet the aspirations of the majority in Southern Ireland. The Republicans were not ready to accept partition. As a consequence, violence erupted, but this time in the North as well. The IRA was mainly responsible for a highly effective guerrilla warfare. Meanwhile, in the 1921 election, of a total of 128 seats for the new Parliament in Southern Ireland, 124 were won unopposed by the 'Sinn Fein' candidates. Negotiations between the British Government and De Valera on 'a restricted form of dominion self-government for the 26 Counties' broke down, when the Dail Cabinet (which met on 16 August 1921) rejected the British proposal of 20 July 1921 for a restricted form of dominion status, stating: "We cannot admit the right of the British Government to mutilate our country either in its own interest or at the call of any section of our population." 30 Throughout the year violence continued unabated. The guerrilla war, led by the IRA, and the loyalist and UVF attacks on Catholic areas put the British Government in a

30. Farrell, n.8, p.42.
quandary. However, it was ready to take drastic action. The Specials\textsuperscript{31} were allowed to go into Catholic ghettos for massive searches. But, on 6 December 1921 a treaty was signed between the British Government and the Irish delegation in London. The Anglo-Irish Treaty provided for the creation of an Irish Free State with dominion status. Although the six Counties were nominally included in it, they were given the right to opt out as a unit. The Treaty also provided for a Boundary Commission to "review the boundary between the two States."\textsuperscript{32}

The Anglo-Irish Treaty of 6 December 1921 could not reconcile all the warring interests in southern Ireland, leading to Civil War between its opponents and protagonists. Following the rejection of the Treaty by De Valera and minority of the Dail Cabinet, Arthur Griffith and Michael

\textsuperscript{31} There were three categories of Special Constabulary -- 'A', 'B' and 'C'. The 'A' Special Constables were attached to the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). A full-time body based in barracks, its members had to undergo a medical inspection. The 'B' Specials, also called the Ulster Special Constabulary (USC), were more numerous. They did not have to undergo medical inspection (nor did Class 'C') and they selected their own officers. While on duty, they were uniformed and armed, but their arms were supposed to remain in local barracks when they were not on duty (these regulations were generally not enforced). The 'B' Specials had to perform a half night's duty per week or one full night per fortnight. 'C' Specials were a general reserve, unpaid and only called out in an emergency. The Special Constabulary was entirely Protestant and many members were also in the Orange Order. The 'A' and 'C' Specials were not used after the 1920s. The 'B' Specials were particularly active in attempts to contain the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and the People's Democracy. Clashes between the RUC, the Specials, loyalists and the civil rights marchers led to violence during 1968-69. As a result of the recommendations of the Hunt Commission, the force was disbanded in April 1970 but many of the members were absorbed into the new Ulster Defence Regiment. Hickey and Doherty, n.26, p.577.

\textsuperscript{32} Farrell, n.8, p.45.
Collins, who had signed the Treaty, became the President and Minister for Finance respectively in South. The IRA leadership too was sharply divided over the Treaty. The Civil War lasted till May 1923; and, even the Boundary Commission, which met in 1925, could not meet the wishes of the participants. From the viewpoint of the Protestants, Donegal, Cavan and Monaghan should come to them, apart from the six Counties. They, thus, saw no reason to give up any part of the six Counties of Ulster, which they had previously occupied, and created obstacles for the Boundary Commission to settle the issue (though the Commission recommended only minor changes). Subsequently, delegates from the Irish Free State gave up the fight after facing severe opposition from the Unionists' side.33

In 1925, the three governments (Britain, Northern Ireland and Ireland) signed an agreement, which recognised the de facto border, which had been drawn in 1920. In 1937, Southern Ireland adopted a new Constitution. Leaving the Commonwealth in 1949, Ireland became a sovereign Republic and severed the remaining constitutional links with the United Kingdom.34

It is pertinent, in this context, to explain why only six Counties of Northern Ireland were sundered from the Southern Ireland. The reason was very simple. The remaining three Counties of Ulster, viz. Cavan, Monaghan and Donegal, had a Catholic majority (in Cavan, 81.5 per cent; in Donegal, 78.9 per cent; and in Monaghan 74.7 per cent). So, if the Unionist Council had opted for all the original nine Counties, of Ulster, they would have gained a small majority only, (56.3 per cent), but with only six Counties they had a

34. John A. Murphy, ed., Ireland in the Twentieth Century (Dublin, 1975), pp.92 ff.
solid majority, (66 per cent). Hence the Unionist Council opted for six Counties, to be on the safer side, even though of these six Counties two -- Fermanagh and Tyrone -- had a Catholic majority (56.2 per cent and 55.4 per cent respectively) and the second largest city of the area, Derry, also had a Catholic majority of 56.2 per cent. Other parts of Northern Ireland, namely South Armagh, South Down including the town of Newry and even Belfast, had only Catholic enclaves. In Belfast, the Catholic population was concentrated in Falls Road in West Belfast. However, according to Farrell, "there was no question of Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) jettisoning any more territory. A four-County state would have been physically, strategically and economically unviable, and would have involved abandoning another 90,000 Protestants to South."35 Even James Craig, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, said in the House of Commons in 1920:

> If we had a nine-Counties Parliament, with sixty four members, the Unionist majority would be about three or four; but in a six County Parliament, with fifty two members, the Unionist majority would be about ten.(36)

It is also significant to note that the Unionists had never demanded a Parliament of their own. James Craig wrote to Lloyd George, the British Prime Minister:

> It is necessary that I should call to your mind the sacrifices we have so recently made in agreeing to self-government and consenting to the establishment of a Parliament for Northern Ireland. Much against our wish, but in the interests of peace, we accepted this as a final settlement of the long outstanding difficulty with which Great Britain has been confronted.(37)

Northern Ireland has an area of 5,542 square miles and its nearest point to Great Britain is barely 13 miles away from Scotland across the narrow North Channel, though the shortest sea ferry from Larne to Stranraer is 38 miles. It has a population of some 1,510,000 (1981 census), of whom two-thirds are descendants of the Scots or the English settlers, who crossed to the north-east of Ireland mainly in the 17th century. Most of them belong to the Protestant community.

The Parliament in Northern Ireland (Stormont) was given jurisdiction over the six Counties of Northern Ireland, namely Antrim, Down, Armagh, Tyrone, Fermagh and Londonderry.

Since 1921, Northern Ireland had been dominated and ruled by the Protestants, otherwise known as the Unionists. When the general election was held in Northern Ireland on 24 May 1921, the Unionists got 40 out of 52 seats, while Sinn Fein and Nationalists got six seats each. With this majority, James Craig, the first Prime Minister, announced his cabinet on 31 May 1921. The Parliament was formally opened with King's speech on 22 June 1921.

Though Northern Ireland was not a sovereign state and was very much a part of the United Kingdom, a fact which was underlined by section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act, it retained its right to make laws for peace, order and good government. Its powers could be revoked at any time by the Westminster, which had retained certain

important imperatives like legislation concerning the Crown, defence, foreign trade, postal services, foreign affairs and excise duties. Further, a convention was established that the internal matters of Northern Ireland would not be discussed at Westminster. Many Unionists also claimed that Stormont was a sovereign body except on those matters, which were reserved for Westminster.

The functions of Stormont were very similar to those of Westminster. The Governor was the Crown's representative appointed for six years. Stormont had two houses -- the Commons and the Senate. The Commons had a strength of fiftytwo members, elected for five years through the system of 'Proportional Representation' (PR) with single transferable vote (as per the Act of 1920). This system was adopted in order to safeguard the interests of the Catholic minority. The Senate had twentysix members. It enjoyed little power or influence in the Government of the Province. Out of the total twentysix members of the Senate, two were ex-officio members -- the Lord Mayor of Belfast and the Mayor of Londonderry. The other twentyfour members were elected by the Commons by Proportional Representation for a term of eight years (half of the Senate members retired in every four years). According to the Act, the Senate was to continue even if the Lower House stood dissolved; it ceased to function only when the Province was to be placed under direct rule from Westminster. Apart from this, twelve elected members from Northern Ireland were sent to Westminster to represent the Province in the British Parliament. (In 1979, their number was increased to 17).

41. Magee, n.37, p.57.
42. O'Brien, n.28, p.129.
Since its very inception, the system of Proportional Representation had been opposed tooth and nail by the Ulster Unionists, so it was abolished in 1929 by James Craig, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, in favour of the British system of single-member constituencies (except the four University seats). Referring to this, Craig said:

... people do not really understand, what result it (PR system) may cause, when it comes to third, fourth, fifth or sixth preferences. By an actual mistake, they might wake up to find Northern Ireland in the perilous position of being submerged in a Dublin Parliament. What I hold is, if the Ulster people are ever going and I pray they may not into a Dublin Parliament, they should understand that they are voting an electoral system such as Proportional Representation.\(^{44}\)

Thus, in 1929, the House of Commons of Northern Ireland Parliament passed the Methods of Voting and Redistribution of Seats Act (Northern Ireland), that abolished the Proportional Representation system in the territorial constituencies, which were divided into forty-eight single-member seats. Four more territorial seats were created, when the Electoral Law (Amendment) Act (NI), 1968, abolished the University constituency.\(^{45}\)

ALLEGATIONS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST CATHOLICS

The worst problem of the new state of Northern Ireland was the continuing polarisation of the supporters of the Nationalist and the Unionist forces, which resulted in intermittent violence and an unbearable strain on the relations between Ireland and Britain. The process was buttressed partly by the 'economic circumstances' to

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segregate Catholics, as well as 'religious segregation', which eventually culminated in political discrimination. The root of this discrimination, as stated earlier, lay in the process of colonisation started in Ulster in the seventeenth century with direct government intervention, except in Monaghan, where it 'continued to be the work of private adventurers, with official support'. This, according to Moody, was in retrospect, a clear-cut move to eliminate the native Irish from certain areas in each County.46

The colonisers of Ireland had different social, cultural and religious backgrounds. They were on the whole more inclined to Britain than towards Ireland. This was rooted in their close commercial, cultural and political ties with Britain.47 This also strained relations between the natives and the colonisers in Ulster.

It is a historical truth that in the nineteenth century, a substantial portion of the rapid industrial expansion was concentrated in the Protestant dominated areas, giving rise inevitably to allegations of discrimination that bred bad blood between the Catholic natives and the Protestant settlers. In the wake of industrialisation, the Catholic population in Belfast city increased from 10 to 30 per cent between 1800 and 1830, intensifying competition among them for jobs and housing.48 No wonder, serious conflicts ensued. For Catholics, job opportunities in Ulster were rather limited. They were

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46. Moody, n.13, p.5.


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called "niggers", who were denied proper housing, education and employment opportunities.49

Apart from this, Belfast, which was a highly industrialised city, witnessed a series of communal riots from 1834 onwards. According to an Irish writer, "The main effects of these riots were to ensure that the expanding population of the city was separated into sectarian areas, and to fortify the communal differences between Catholics and Protestants." 50

A century later, despite several social and political upheavals, the situation did not change much regarding discrimination. This is quite evident from a speech of Basil Brooke, Minister for Agriculture from 1933 to 1941, and later on Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. On 13 July 1933, Basil Brooke said:

There are a great number of Protestants and Orangemen who employ Roman Catholics. I feel I can speak freely on this subject as I have not a Roman Catholic about my own place.... I would appeal to Loyalists, therefore, wherever possible, to employ good Protestant lads and lassies.(51)

Basil Brooke went on then to refer to an allegation by Cahir Healy, the Nationalist M.P., that in public appointments the Catholic minority was not given its due share. Refuting this allegation, he asserted that the Catholics got "too many" appointments, although they were really out to cut the Unionists' throats, if an opportunity arose. He said that it would be "sheer madness" to keep on

50. Darby, n.47, p.6.
51. Fermanagh Times (Fermanagh), 13 July 1933.
giving such men appointments under the existing conditions. This outburst aroused much criticism, but that did not detract Basil Brooke from his earlier stand. He, in fact, asserted that he would not withdraw even a single word of what he had said while dealing with the employment of Catholics, as he was not speaking from the religious point of view, but because he knew that the vast majority of Roman Catholics in Ireland were disloyal. This second speech by Basil Brooke aroused a sharper controversy than the first one, because being a member of the Government he discriminated against the minority community. Speaking at the Annual Meeting of Londonderry Unionist Association, 19 March 1934, this was made more explicit by him:

...thinking out the whole question carefully ... I recommended those people who are loyalists not to employ Roman Catholics, ninety-nine per cent of whom are disloyal .... I want you to remember one point in regard to the employment of people who are disloyal. There are often difficulties in the way, but usually there are plenty of good men and women available, and the employers don't bother to employ them. You are disfranchising yourselves in that way. You people, who are employers, have the ball at your feet. If you don't act properly now before we know where we are we shall find ourselves in the minority instead of the majority. I want you to realise that, having done your bit, you have got your Prime Minister behind you.(54)

According to Terence O'Neill, violent vituperation of Basil Brooke should be viewed in the right context, as the Irish Republican Army had threatened to kidnap one of his sons, who was then a child. It was in the bitterness of the moment that he was reported to have said that he would never ----------------------

52. Ibid.
53. Ibid., 17 August 1933.
54. Londonderry Sentinel (Londonderry), 20 March 1934.
employ a Catholic on his large estates of Fermanagh. But one should be very clear about Basil Brooke’s statements given in 1933, 1934, 1935 and 1936, as they had no reference to the kidnaping threat. His speeches of 1933 and 1934 were also debated in the Stormont in March 1934. Here again there was no reference to the kidnaping plot.

Moreover, the then Prime Minister Lord Craigvon, did not dissociate himself from whatever Basil Brooke had said. In his reply to the debate on 20 March 1934, the Prime Minister said:

My right hon. Friend [Sir Basil Brooke] spoke as a member of His Majesty’s Government. He spoke entirely on his own, when he made the speech, to which the hon. Member refers, but there is not one of my colleagues, who does not entirely agree with him, and I would not ask him to withdraw one word he said.

Such statements indicate that Catholics suffered discrimination in the job market in Northern Ireland. Implicitly, to get employment it was necessary to be "Loyal". What exactly this meant was stated by the Prime Minister on 21 November 1934 in the Stormont during a debate on refusal of public appointments to the Catholic minority. Lord Craigvon categorically stated:

The appointment made by the Government are made as far as we can possibly manage it of loyal men and women .... Mr. O’Neill: How do you test their loyalty? The Prime Minister: There are ways of finding that out.

57. Ibid., col.618.
Job discrimination against the Catholics seems to have been practised both in the manual labour sector and in the sector of executive, administrative and clerical jobs.

As far manual labour, the minority constituted just over 40 per cent of the Labour force. In all the six County Councils, the number of Catholics employed in the executive and clerical jobs were substantially less in proportion to their population. But in the County Down the situation was slightly better. This was due to the fact that there were five non-Unionist Councils in the County, four of them clustered around Newry. The figures of employment in 1951 speak for themselves.

**EMPLOYMENT OF CATHOLICS, 1951**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>County</th>
<th>No. of Officials</th>
<th>No. of Catholics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Antrim</td>
<td>257</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Armagh</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Derry</td>
<td>206</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Down</td>
<td>294</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fermanagh</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyrone</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

In public employment discrimination was seen against Catholics particularly in Derry and Fermanagh, where Protestant emigration was encouraged to counter the higher Catholic birth rate, which had increased from 33.5 per cent to 34.9 per cent in 1962. A census taken in 1971 by the

60. Farrell, n.8, p.86.
61. Gallagher, n.8, p.86.
62. Moody, n.13, p.27.
Fair Employment Agency shows as below the differences in unemployment ratio:

**UNEMPLOYMENT AND RELIGION 1971(%)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Males and Females</th>
<th>Males only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All Northern Ireland</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>10.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roman Catholics</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>17.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Protestants</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

These are just a few examples of discrimination in government jobs that could easily be discerned. The situation in the private sector was no better. For example, according to a statement made in 1946 at a Unionist meeting in Derry by H. McLaughlin, an industrialist, "or the past 48 years since the foundation of his firm there had been only one Roman Catholic employed -- and that was a case of mistaken identity." To quote another such statement, Senator J. Barnhill said in Londonderry on 9 January 1964: "Charity begins at home. If we are going to employ people, we should give preference to Unionists." The employment situation in the shipyards and the heavy engineering industry also confirmed the same pattern.

The recruitment to the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Specials was yet another example stark of


64. *Derry People* (Londonderry), 26 September 1946.

discrimination. According to Farrell, "From the very beginning the Specials were a Protestant and Loyalist force." The Hunt Committee, constituted in 1969, for "Reorganisation of the Police Force" in Northern Ireland, found that: "Whilst there is no law or official rule that precludes any person, whatever his religion, from joining the Ulster Special Constabulary, the fact remains that for a variety of reasons no Roman Catholic is a member." It recommended, therefore, the disbandment of the Ulster special Constabulary. It found that the idea of a Departmental Committee, appointed by Dawson Bates in 1922, to recruit one-third Roman Catholics to the regular force, had not yet been translated into reality. It also found that, by 1969, the Royal Ulster Constabulary had only 11 per cent Catholics. Here, the significance of a law and order-keeping force overwhelmingly dominated by the majority community, cannot be overlooked.

Discrimination was manifest not only in jobs but also in housing. For example, between 1945 and 1967, the local authorities built 1,048 houses, of which 195 or 18 per cent were allocated to the Catholics and 853 or 82 per cent to the Protestants.

To secure permanent control over 'electoral divisions' and 'ward boundaries', the Unionists appeared to be maneuvering to favour Protestants or Unionist supporters in making public appointments and allocating Council housing. According to Moody, "even houses were built and

66. Farrell, n.8, p.67.
68. Ibid., p.29.
allocated by the local authorities in such a way as not to disturb the electoral balance. All this has been vividly portrayed in the Cameron Report of 1969, which received complaints from the local population regarding housing and representation of minority in local government in certain areas. However, the Cameron Commission which was appointed by the Northern Ireland government in 1969, came to the conclusion that:

...in certain areas... namely Dungannon, Armagh, and in particular, Londonderry, the arrangement of ward boundaries for local government purposes has produced in the local authority a permanent Unionist majority, which bears little or no resemblance to the relative numerical strength of Unionists and non-Unionists in the area. As we show later, we have to record that there is very good reason to believe the allegation that these arrangements were deliberately made and maintained with the consequence that the Unionist used and have continued to use the electoral majority thus created to favour Protestant or Unionist supporters in making public appointments -- particularly those of senior officials -- and in manipulating housing allocations for political and sectarian ends. (72)

The abolition of the system of 'Proportional Representation' in 1929, is yet another example of discrimination against the Catholic minority. It gave a firm hold to the Protestant community through gerrymandering constituencies, forestalling thus the development of any strong opposition in Stormont and keeping the provincial government firmly Unionist. This change in the electoral system was opposed by the Nationalist and other non-Unionist

70. Moody, n.13, p.31.

71. For details, see Appendix -- I.


24
parties. The Unionists were also elected unopposed several times. For example, the average of uncontested seats between 1923 and 1955 was: Rural Councils, 96 per cent; and County Councils, 60 per cent. Even Terence O'Neill, who later rose to the Prime Ministership of Northern Ireland, first entered the Parliament in 1946, but did not have to face an electoral contest until 1969.

The electoral system of Northern Ireland, though similar to that of Westminster, virtually gave a free hand to the Protestant majority. Electoral areas were determined by the Government, and, as set out in the first schedule of the 1920 Act, were intended to be permanent and unchanging. In fact, the right to vote was linked with property status, which was known as 'business premises' qualification.

It is thus clear that the electoral system in Northern Ireland was tilted heavily in favour of the Ulster Unionist Party. The professional and business classes were also predominantly Protestants. This apart, a graduate had voting rights for the four University seats. Discrimination in plural voting and the University representation continued in Northern Ireland till 1968.

Over and above these, in order to quell violence in the Province, the Stormont passed a draconian Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act in 1922, which became handy for exclusive use against the minority. This Special Powers

73. Farrell, n.8, p.85.
75. It means that a voter occupying business premises, with a ratable value of £10, in another constituency, could claim a further vote.
Act was renewed every year till 1928 and then renewed for five years and thereafter, in 1933, it was made permanent. It provided for death penalty for offenses linked with use of firearms and explosives, and flogging and imprisonment for others; for prohibition of inquests; and for arrest without warrant. It also empowered the Government to make further regulations, each enforced with new laws, without consulting the Parliament. However, there were claims and counter-claims by the opposite groups on discrimination. The Nationalist spokesmen often complained that there was widespread discrimination against their people, whereas the Unionist spokesmen denied its very existence.

Although most Catholics considered themselves second class citizens, yet the fact remains that they were benefited a good deal by the social welfare policies introduced in the UK as well as in Northern Ireland after the World War-II. For instance, the Education Act of 1947 opened up higher education to all those with the ability to take advantage of it. The door to higher education was opened to any child, who had sufficient ability to qualify for admission, regardless of what his social or economic background was. The minority won a resounding victory, when it succeeded in extracting from the Government the concession, that the grants, which it received under the Act

77. Farrell, n.8, pp.93-4.

of 1930 for 50 per cent of running costs for the new building and reconstruction, would be raised to 65 per cent.\textsuperscript{79} O'Neill's attempt at broadening the economic base also met with some success:

...in the sixties, the number in employment rose, housing output increased, the index of wages rose from 100 in 1960 to 118 in 1963, to 173 in 1968. An Education Act of 1969 gave more money to Catholic voluntary schools.\textsuperscript{80}

Such concessions were viewed as peripheral in nature, a typical case of being 'too little and too late'. It appears that no concerted effort was made to grapple with the central problem facing the minority community in Northern Ireland, so nothing could prevent discrimination from becoming virtually institutionalised and eventually taking a sectarian turn. Northern Ireland was consequently rocked by a series of riots in the 1930s and late 1960s.

These were in no small a measure caused by the exploitation of the explosive communal and economic situation by various antagonistic political parties and militant groups from time to time. This made the role of political parties and groups in Northern Ireland pertinent. Broadly, they could be divided into three groups -- Unionists on one side and the anti-partitionist parties like the Nationalist Party, and the Republicans (Sinn Fein) on the other. The Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) has taken a centrist position. While the first two groups roughly represented the two different communities, which had an uneasy relationship in Northern Ireland, the NILP has members cutting across the community barriers.


\textsuperscript{80} W.D. Birrell, "Relative Deprivation as A Factor in Conflict in Northern Ireland". (A paper presented to the Conference on Conflict in Northern Ireland, University of Lancaster, December 1971), p.13.
THE UNIONISTS

The Unionist Party, which ruled Northern Ireland uninterruptedly for almost half-a-century, was established in 1886, when the first 'Home Rule' Bill was introduced. Initially, it was composed of industrialists, landowners, Orange men and Liberals, who feared Home Rule in Ireland, and Protestant workers in the shipyards, mills and factories, and farmers.81 The unbroken dominance of Unionist Party in Northern Ireland from 1921 to March 1972 had resulted in the widening of class divisions in Northern Ireland -- an economic chasm, unfavourable to the minority, which was actively supported by the Orange Order and its institutions. Indeed, the Orange Order became one of the most indispensable instruments to mobilise the labouring and poor partisan class Protestants against the emergent power of Catholic minority which, anyway, formed the socio-economic sub-class of Northern Ireland. It gave articulate expression to Protestant partisan, social, secular, religious and political sects. It also provided an effective and successful way of maintaining a united spirit among the 'Protestant brethren' as distinct from all social classes.82

The ties between the Orange Order and the Unionist Party were also quite close. It was expected that a member of the Unionist Party should also be a member of the Orange Order. It is interesting to note that, of the total 54 Unionist members of the Northern Ireland Parliament, who joined the Cabinet between 1921 and 1969, only three were outside the Orange Order.83 Orangemen were so loyal to their institution that, on 24 April 1934, the first Prime

82. Barritt and Carter, n.3, p.46.
83. Darby, n.47, p.83.
Minister of Northern Ireland, James Craig (1921-40), said: "I am an Orangeman first and a politician and a member of this Parliament afterwards.... All I boast is that we have a Protestant Parliament and a Protestant state." John Miller Andrews, another Prime Minister of Northern Ireland (1940-43), said in 1941: "I am delighted to have behind me the Great Orange Order." In fact, it was the Orange Order, which opposed any attempt for Unionist membership to the Catholics. But, as was observed by Clarence Graham, Chairman of Standing Committee of the Ulster Unionist Council, in November 1959, there was "no reason why a Catholic should not be selected as a Unionist candidate for Parliament." The relationship between the two can also be seen from the fact that the Unionist Constituency Association often met at Orange halls and they used these halls as their campaign headquarters. According to Lawrence Orr, an Orangeman and a member of Westminster Parliament in 1920, "Without the Orange Order there would have been no Unionist Party and no union. If the Orange Order and the Unionist Party were to be separated, the Unionist Party would cease to exist as such."

In a broader framework, the Ulster Unionist Council's principal political concerns were: (a) the constitutional issues; (b) anti-socialism; and (c) anti-Catholicism.

The constitutional issues were not discussed frequently. Nevertheless, the Ulster Unionist Council was

84. NI, Commons, _Parliamentary Debates_, vol.xvi, cols.1091-5.
85. T.J. Campbell, _Fifty Years of Ulster, 1890-1940_ (Belfast, 1941), p.98.
86. Darby, n.47, p.87.
ready to defend to the hilt the constitutional position between Ulster and the United Kingdom. At the 1924 Annual Meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council, it was stated that, "... a series of demonstrations was held in Northern Ireland, and the solidarity of the Loyalist (Unionist) Party was shown by the enormous crowds who attended...as well as by the unanimity with which the resolutions against any attempt to dismember the six Counties were passed."^88 J.M. Andrews, Northern Ireland Prime Minister, made explicit in 1936: "We shall never have a boundary between ourselves and Great Britain, and we are determined, come what may, to hold what we have got. We are determined to maintain our Parliament."^89

The second concern of the Unionists was the growing socialism. They viewed that the growth of the British Labour Party after the World War-I and the establishment of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) in 1923 posed a new and different threat to the Unionist control of the Province. Although the leadership of the Unionist Party had always been in the hands of the 'landed aristocracy', the 'rank and file' belonged predominantly to the working class, so it was feared that the 'socio-economic policy' of the Labour Party might attract the rank and file of the Unionists, which might lead to their defection to the NILP.\(^90\) This fear was raised in the Annual Unionist Council Meeting of 1924, which stated: "In view of insidious attacks through Socialist propaganda, steps should be taken forthwith in the various Constitutional Associations to combat this menace."\(^91\)

88. See, Ulster Unionist Council, UUC Annual Report, 1924 (Belfast, 1924).
90. Ibid.
91. See, Ulster Unionist Council, UUC Annual Report, 1924 (Belfast, 1924).
The third objective of the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) was to strengthen the anti-Roman Catholic build-up. A UUC resolution said: "In order to relieve the distress due to the continued depression in trade, it is the duty of the Council to do all in its power, by individual effort, to relieve the unemployment amongst the Loyalist population in Ulster."92 As a result, the Catholic minority suffered discrimination in jobs, housing and political rights. This sectarian attitude and the religious discrimination against the Catholic minority were quite obvious from the very beginning of the establishment of the Northern Ireland Parliament. E.M. Archdale, Minister of Agriculture (1921-25) and Imperial Grand Master of the Orange Order said on 31 March 1925, "I have 109 officials and as far as I know there are four Roman Catholics; three of them were civil servants, turned over to me, whom I had to take, when we began."93 Later on, as noted earlier, Basil Brooke, who became the Agriculture Minister and later the Prime Minister, also adopted the same anti-Catholic attitude.

Therefore, between 1921 and 1945, the Ulster Unionist Council seem to have three political aims, viz. (i) to defend the constitutional link between the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland; (ii) to undermine the concept of socialism; and (iii) to dominate over the Roman Catholic minority.

The introduction of the Welfare State in Britain after the end of the World War-II had changed the Unionist thinking to some extent. According to the Act of 1920, Britain and Northern Ireland agreed that all British social reforms were liable to be implemented in Northern Ireland.

92. Ibid.
93. Campbell, n.85, p.97.
also. However, after 1945, there emerged liberal elements within the Unionist Party itself, which were of the view, that the introduction of the Educational Act 1947 would be beneficial to the Catholic middle class, which would feel quite happy to settle down in a reformed Ulster State rather than ask for a 'United Ireland'. These "liberals", who were demanding modernisation of the party, came out in 1942 with a clear expression of their discontent in a pamphlet, entitled The Strength and the Sinews. This pamphlet, written by Jim Bailie and Brian Faulkner, was a "straightforward plea for the modernisation of the Party".

According to Darby, many Unionists sincerely believed that the new liberalism was a greater danger to their nascent state than any number of IRA campaigns. In 1959, they got a much awaited opportunity to demonstrate their strength.

In November 1959, Clarence Graham, who was the Chairman of the Standing Committee of the Ulster Unionist Council, declared that he could see no reason why a Catholic should not be selected as a Unionist candidate for the Parliament. His idea was also supported by Brian Maginess, the Attorney General, which lent the suggestion more weight. But, George Clark, Grand Master of the Grand Order Lodge of Ireland, reacted sharply to it, delivering within a week the verdict of the Orange Order:

It is difficult to see how a Roman Catholic, with the vast differences in our religious outlooks, could be either acceptable within the Unionist Party as a member or, for that matter, bring himself unconditionally to support its ideals. (98)

96. Harbinson, n.89, p.38.
97. Darby, n.47, p.87.
98. Belfast Telegraph (Belfast), 10 November 1959.
In November 1959, Lord Brookeborough (earlier Basil Brooke), Northern Ireland Prime Minister, also spoke in the same vein in a meeting of the Young Unionists at Lisbellow:

There is no use blinking the fact that political differences in Northern Ireland closely follow religious differences. It may not be impossible, but it certainly is not easy for any person to discard the political conceptions, the influence and impressions acquired from religious and educational instruction by those whose aims are openly declared to be an all-Ireland Republic. (99)

When Lord Brookeborough was replaced by Terence O'Neill as Prime Minister, the latter sought to discover ways and means of a reconciliation between the Unionists and the Nationalists, although, he discovered to his cost soon that this aim was more ideal than practical. The effort of the Liberal Unionists, who tried to build bridges with the Catholics, was also evident from the fact that in 1965 Terence O'Neill, Northern Ireland Prime Minister, paid the first visit ever by a Northern Ireland Prime Minister to a Catholic school. And on 8 April 1966, he gave a speech to a joint Protestant-Catholic conference at Corrymeela, where he urged to close the rift in the community. (100) This sparked off the demand by militant Unionists, who had emerged by this time as Paisleyites, for O'Neill's removal from the office. "O'Neill must go" became the policy of their newspaper, The Protestant Telegraph. (101) They also intensified their campaign, when O'Neill invited the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic, Sean Lemass, to Stormont on 14 January 1965, and subsequently paid a return visit to Dublin. It was

100. O'Neill, n.55, pp.113-6.
a dramatic initiative to build bridges between the two parts of Ireland.102

It was due to this policy of O'Neill, that he became a paradoxical figure among the Protestants. It seems that he did not choose to consult his Parliamentary Party before he undertook this historic meeting with Sean Lemass. And the growing opposition within and outside the Unionist Party led him finally to resign in 1969. Nevertheless, the fact remained that despite all such dichotomy in the Unionist ranks, the Unionists of all hues and colours were all one on the issue of maintaining their 'constitutional link' with Great Britain.

James Chichester Clark, who replaced Terence O'Neill in 1969, also wanted some change in the Unionist policy and had the same outlook. He said:

I want to make it very clear indeed that in the name of party, I welcome those Roman Catholics who wish to be associated with Unionism and support its principles -- not just as voters, but as active members -- with, of course, an equal right with all other party members to be considered for party office and all that flows from it.(103)

Despite such unambiguous declarations of well-intended wishes from the mount, the question of Catholic membership to the Unionist Party was not resolved; and when, in 1969, a Young Catholic tried to secure Unionist nomination in Newry, his effort ended up in smoke.

The initiation of these sporadic attempts at reconciliation between the Unionists and the Nationalists by


a section of the Unionists fuelled a new wave of militant Protestantism under the leadership of Ian K. Paisley, moderator of Free Presbyterians. Thus, despite the growth of a new movement demanding full civil rights for all citizens of Northern Ireland -- Protestants as well as Catholics -- the old antagonism not only survived but also even acquired new sinister dimensions. This was the general socio-political scenario during the late 1960s and early 1970s.

ANTI-PARTITIONIST PARTIES

The leading anti-partitionist parties, which spearheaded the Republican movement in Northern Ireland, were: the Sinn Fein (Republican Party) and the Nationalist Party.

Sinn Fein (The Republican Party)\textsuperscript{104}

Sinn Fein was founded by Arthur Griffith in 1905. Griffith was opposed to socialism, because he feared the very concept of class conflict. According to him, 'The solidarity of labour' was a phrase used by the British working men to get Irishmen to help them in their disputes.\textsuperscript{105}

At the beginning, Sinn Fein was not a Republican Party. Hence, in its formative years, it did not strike root among the masses and was confined largely to Dublin only. The years 1907-1908 were, however, a landmark in the history of Sinn Fein, as it made in these years, its 'first incursion' into national politics, although, when it contested the Parliamentary seats from North Leitrim in 1908, it lost miserably. As a result, it did not venture to put up

\textsuperscript{104} 'Sinn Fein' means 'Ourselves Alone'.
any candidate during the general elections of 1910.106 This was partly due to the fact that it was financially not sound enough to fight the parliamentary elections. The initiative taken by Arthur Griffith in 1909-10 to run a newspaper, *Sinn Fein*, also suffered a setback for want of funds. Subsequently, the party it brought out a pamphlet, saying that Sinn Fin was not a party but a forum of demand for an independent Ireland. One of its pamphlets said:

> Above the cries of contending parties we raise the cry of Ireland and Irish independence .... Not an Ireland for a class or a creed, but an Ireland for the Irish, and the whole of the Irish, not an Ireland fettered and trammelled by England, but mistress of her own destinies, evolving her own national life and building for herself an ever increasing prosperity .... We have to recognise the nation, rather than parties within the nation; for it is greater than any party, and in the service of the nation all men have an equal right as well as an equal duty.(107)

From 1910 to 1913, Sinn Fein was practically moribund, but in 1913 it became active by rearming itself with Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) to counter the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). When the World War-I broke out, Sinn Fein denounced the participation of the National Volunteers and the UVF in the war. During the Easter Rising (1916), Sinn Fein played an important role. Some writers characterise it as "Sinn Fein Rebellion". This is, however, not correct, as the individual Sinn Fein members, who participated in it, did so as Volunteers or Citizen Army and not as members of Griffith's organization.108 Griffith did, of course toy with the idea to join the fighting, but changed his mind subsequently.

106. Ibid.


The non-involvement of Griffith in the "Rising" could not save him from his arrest. On his release from jail at the end of 1916, he resumed the publication of his paper, Nationality, in 1917. His main idea was to educate the people, not about the "Rising", but about its underlying causes - the Union of Ireland - and 'the proposition that Ireland should be allowed to put her case for independence to the Peace Conference when the war was over'. This remained the core element of the Sinn Fein policy.

The 1916 Rising, which was mainly confined to Dublin, was crushed by the British soldiers. The subsequent executions of the Republican leaders and imprisonment of the rank and file were resented by the Irish people. Many, who had sat on the fence during the rebellion now became activists and popular support for Irish separatism grew from a peripheral issue to a mass movement.

The British Prime Minister then proposed a National Convention to settle the Irish problem, but Sinn Fein declined to attend it and held instead its own Convention. A dramatic change took place, when, on 25 October 1917, Ard-Fheis (Annual Meeting) took place to elect the President of Sinn Fein. In a surprise move, the founder of Sinn Fein -- Arthur Griffith -- and his associate, Count Plunkett, were dropped and Emon de Valera was chosen unanimously as its President. But, that did not affect the unity in Sinn Fein and its resolve that they wanted "complete and absolute independence and the form of government would be decided later on". By this time, the metamorphosis was complete and Sinn Fein was totally committed to the Republican policy. This marked a significant advancement in the direction of unity within the Party. The outcome was that in the general elections of

109. Ibid.
110. Ibid.
1918, out of 105 candidates Sinn Fein put up for the British House of Commons, as many as 73 got elected. In twentyfive constituencies, they were returned unopposed. This landslide victory of Sinn Fein was a historic event. Its most significant outcome, however, was that Sinn Fein put of rout the Home Rule Party. The elected Sinn Fein candidates in this election refused to take their seats at Westminster.\textsuperscript{111} This made for to the formation of Dail Eireann, which demanded a separate Parliament for Ireland.

Meanwhile, the re-organisation of the Irish Volunteers in 1919 led to the formation of the Irish Republican Army, which was regarded as the Army of the Dail Eireann (Parliament of Irish Republic). The IRA mounted a guerrilla campaign against the British. In 1920, the Ireland Act was passed, which gave birth to two Parliaments -- one for the South and another for the North. However, the guerrilla campaign continued until the British Government agreed to a ceasefire on 10 July 1921, which was a precursor to the signing of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, 6 December 1921.

The Republican movement was sharply divided over the Anglo-Irish Treaty. Within the movement, the Treaty was supported by a small majority among the political leadership -- the Dail Cabinet and the Dail -- and the military leadership -- the IRA headquarters. A majority of the Sinn Fein and the IRA -- 9 out of 15 divisions and 3 out of 5 independent brigades -- were, however, opposed to it.\textsuperscript{112}

Meanwhile, in 1921, elections took place in the South as well as in the North. The Sinn Fein in the South won unopposed 124 out of 128 seats, -- an unprecedented victory indeed for the Sinn Fein. But in the North, it drew almost a blank: of 52 seats in the Northern Ireland

\textsuperscript{111} Lysaght, n.20, p.66.
\textsuperscript{112} Farrell, n.8, p.46.
Parliament, it won only six.\textsuperscript{113} By 1925, the prospects for Sinn Fein grew dim, partly because its policy of abstention from Stormont, on principle, disheartened the Catholic voters, who now began to set greater store by socio-economic issues than Irish unity.\textsuperscript{114} Thus, in the 1925 elections, Sinn Fein lost to the Nationalists four seats and was able to retain only two. By 1929, however, the Sinn Fein threat disappeared altogether from the political scene of North Ireland.\textsuperscript{115}

Since of the Sinn Fein candidates aimed at gauging the entrenched support, campaigning was minimal and lackadaisical, without any effort to gain support across the sectarian divide. The state's refusal to allow the Republicans normal political exchanges led them to ignore the need of not having a consistent attitude towards the state. This response was not, as then maintained, prompted by any ideological opposition to the state. However, the 1962 Electoral Act forced the candidates to "recognise the lawful authority of the Parliament of Northern Ireland".\textsuperscript{116} This was a further concretisation of the 1934 Representation of the Peoples Act, which had declared that the candidates should declare their intent to sit in the assembly if elected. With a view to countering further the actions and policies of the Republicans, the Flags and Emblems (Display) Act (1954) forbade the display of flags and emblems, which may lead to a breach of peace and amity. The attack could, in reality, be then seen as against the Republican symbols and emblems. These directives were widely perceived as measures against the electoral ambitions of Sinn Fein and the Republican movement, leaving the Republicans little

\textsuperscript{113} Harbinson, n.89, Appendix A, p.178.
\textsuperscript{114} Arthur, n.74, p.55.
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Darby, n.47, p.92.
leverage but to emphasise their resolve to use the military means.\textsuperscript{117}

Although the goal of the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was a united Ireland, it developed a variety of interests. The foremost objective of the IRA in Northern Ireland was the defence of the Catholics against a possible assault on them. The primacy of this defensive role of the IRA overshadowed all other objectives such as a 'United Ireland' and a 'Socialist Ireland'. The Catholic minority of the Northern Ireland was conscious of the defensive role of the IRA. This was quite evident during the 1920s and 1930s, when sectarian troubles erupted from time to time in Ulster. The IRA retained during these two decades considerable popular support among the Catholics in Belfast, which got visibly eroded during the next two decades -- a period of comparative peace. Furthermore, since the movement kept the IRA sectarian, it was quite natural that the IRA made no special effort to enlist the support of Protestants.\textsuperscript{118}

In the 1955 British Parliamentary elections, Sinn Fein contested twelve seats but won only two. But, in 1959 elections, it lost those two seats as well and its share of total votes in Northern Ireland plummeted from 26 to 14 per cent.\textsuperscript{119} Consequently, in subsequent years, the Republican Party increasingly adopted a militant strategy. The IRA's border campaign in 1956 - 62, which was aimed at undoing partition and completing the process of British withdrawal, ended in total failure.\textsuperscript{120} In 1962, most Republican leaders

\textsuperscript{117} Ibid., pp.92-3.

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid., p.93.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., pp.13-14.

\textsuperscript{120} Kevin Boyle, Tom Hadden and Paddy Hillyard, Ten Years on in Northern Ireland: The Legal Control of Political Violence (Nottingham, 1980), p.15.
and the IRA realised, that they could not achieve their objectives by the use of force. 121 This realisation again led to radical changes in the Republican strategy, which now began to lay more emphasis on social issues like housing and trade unionism. Henceforth, the Republicans abjured the use of violence, gaining as a result even the non-Catholic support.

The IRA also tried to take every possible advantage of the Civil Rights Movement of 1968-69, but it failed to assume the movement's control. It also failed to protect the Catholic ghettos, from a pogrom, organised by the Protestant extremists. Therefore, on many walls, it was written "IRA -- I Ran Away". 122

The violence of August 1969 in Northern Ireland, however, brought sharp reaction against both the policies and leadership of the Republican organisation and, thus, there were two divisions -- "Officials", which kept some supporters in Belfast, Derry and in a few County areas, and "Provisionals", which became quite influential in the North. The "Officials" were more left-oriented, and sought a "United Socialist Republican Ireland achieved by Marxist-style war of national liberation." 123 And the "Provisionals" sought to "unite Ireland and terminate British political-military influence by means of the bullet and the bomb." 124

121. Henry Kelly, "The IRA Sinister or Sad?", Fortnight (Belfast), no. 9, 22 January 1971, p. 7.


124. Ibid.
The Nationalist Party

The history of the Nationalist Party\textsuperscript{125} goes back to the establishment of the United Irish League (UIL), which was led by John Redmond. Largely, the Nationalists were the remnants of the United Irish League.\textsuperscript{126} Since the beginning, the United Irish League supported Britain's war effort. But, after the 1916 "Rising", especially after the emotional anguish caused by the execution of the 1916 leaders, it was superseded by the Sinn Fein in the British general election, held in 1918.\textsuperscript{127}

The title, "Nationalist Party", encompasses the majority of groups, which stood for attaining Irish unity by constitutional means. However, in a formal sense, the title had been in general use except for two specific periods: firstly, between 1928 and the mid-1930s, it was called the Nationalist League of the North, which maintained links with a similar neo-Redmondite group in the South; secondly, from 1945 to the mid-1950s, it was called the Anti-Partisan League. That apart, in the generally agreed sense of the term, the Nationalist Party scarcely manifested any characteristic of an established political party. A formal organisation or structure was conspicuous by its absence (annual conferences were not held until 1965); concomitantly a formal statement of policy by the Party had to wait till November 1964. In reality, the Party merely operated at the

\textsuperscript{125} The Nationalist Party was the main constitutional anti-partition Party in the North from 1921 onwards. From 1928 to the mid-1930s, its proper title was the National League of the North, and from 1945 to the mid-1950s it was Anti-Partition League. The Nationalist Party has been the Official title since the mid-1950s.

\textsuperscript{126} Arthur, n.74, p.55.

\textsuperscript{127} Ibid.
parliamentary level, wherein it mainly consisted of 'a loose alliance of local notables'.

Since, by 1921, twenty-six of Ireland's thirty-two counties had achieved Home Rule, the activities of the Nationalist Party were confined to the six remaining counties of Northern Ireland. Though both the Nationalist Party and the IRA disapproved of the existence of Northern Ireland as a separate entity, the Nationalist Party's relative ineffectiveness was partly an offshoot of the Northern Ireland politics and partly of its own inactivity and political short-sightedness.

During the first election in Northern Ireland in 1921, the Nationalists won only six seats. Thereafter they refused to take their seats in the Northern Ireland Parliament. Later on, however, they fared better due to their emphasis on 'social and economic issues' rather than on Irish unity, which was the sole aim of Sinn Fein. (In 1925 elections, they won 10 seats, whereas Sinn Fein was left with only two).

It was not until 1927 that the Nationalists took their seats in the Northern Ireland Parliament. This metamorphosis in their policy was brought about by two developments: (i) the formation of Fianna Fail Party in the South by Eamon de Valera in August 1927, which approved the 'Treaty settlement' and the 'Partition', and agreed to work within its framework; and (ii) the intention of James Craig, Northern Ireland Prime Minister, to abolish the 'Proportional Representation' system for parliamentary

129. Farrell, n.8, p.98.
elections in Northern Ireland. The Nationalists viewed it as an attempt to gerrymander the elections, so, they decided to continue their fight constitutionally by taking opposition seats in the Parliament. 131

Meanwhile, Joe Devlin, the Nationalist leader, who dominated the Nationalist Party in the 1920s and 1930s, formed an alliance with the rest of the Opposition. In 1929, he denounced the Government's proposal of abolishing 'Proportional Representation'. In this he got full support of the Opposition. By this time, the Nationalists had gained full strength in the Northern Ireland Parliament. With a view to creating a new political organisation, they formed, in 1928, the National League of the North, "with local branches, an annual conference and an elected central Council". 132 The formation of the National League of the North, however, could not prevent the abolition of Proportional Representation. Nevertheless, the Nationalists improved their position by winning 11 seats in the Northern Ireland Parliamentary election, held in May 1929. Their election manifesto emphasised the objective of achieving a "United Ireland" by non-violent means. Besides, it emphasized ending of unemployment, raising of the school leaving age to 13, old age pension of 1 a week at the age of 60, town planning, slum clearance and public utility works to eradicate unemployment. 133

Despite good support in the elections, the Nationalists failed to build up a party organisation, so the Party continued to function mostly on personal lines. Indeed, it had generally to depend upon the personal qualities and charisma of some influential personages, who came up from time to time to put together the different

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132. Ibid., p.112.
133. Ibid., pp.113-4.
strands in the Party to carve out a close unity. Due to lack of organisation and consistent leadership, the Nationalist Party came to be largely dominated by a rural Catholic middle class, which was without a positive direction, much less a coherent policy. In the event, the Party remained no more than a 'loose alliance of local notables'. After the death in 1934 of Joe Devlin, who had mustered support not only from the Catholics but also from the Ancient Order of Hibernians (the counterpart of the Orange Order), the mantle of the Party leadership fell on J.F. Stewart.

The formation of the Irish Union Association in 1936 and, subsequently, the National Unity in 1959, as a "para-political pressure group to educate nationalist opinion", led to the Maghera Conference of 1964. It was at this Conference that "all shades of 'green' argued to bury the hatchet in favour of a united front". But these attempts were unsuccessful. Though the Nationalist Party had a long-term hope of gaining support from the Catholics, it rejected the idea of the use of force to attain its objectives. However, it failed to assume the role of a normal Opposition in the Parliament for quite a long time, and by the 1950s a tacit alliance was formed between the Sinn Fein and the Nationalists, whereby the Sinn Fein contested the Westminster elections and the Nationalists the Stormont elections.

The declaration of the Labour Government, which came to power after the World War II, that "in no event will

134. Arthur, n.74, p.56.
137. Arthur, n.74, p.57.
Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland", and the border campaign launched by the IRA in 1956-62, made the realization of the Nationalist objective of eventual unification of Ireland more difficult.138

After J.F. Stewart, the leadership of the Party was assumed by Eddie McAteer, who was sensitive to the accusations of the Unionist Party that the Ancient Order of Hibernians had undue influence on the Nationalist Party. But he also conceded that it was "part of the fabric for survival", as it could also provide jobs for Catholics and uphold their right to parade in certain areas.139 Nevertheless, in 1962, he suggested regular meetings between the Ancient Order of Hibernians and the Orange Order leadership as a measure to improve community relations. As a result, the 'Orange Order and Green talks' took place between October 1962 and early 1963, but there was no tangible result.140 The Nationalist Party declared its policy, for the first time, at the Conference in Maghera in 1964. It also took firm steps to resume the seat of the official Opposition, after the meeting of Terence O'Neill, Northern Ireland Prime Minister, and Sean Lemass, the Irish Prime Minister, in 1965. In 1966, the Party held its first annual conference and published a party manifesto later on. Thus, gradually, the Party gained support in the County areas and was able to hold a majority of Opposition seats. Nevertheless, in the Party a new generation had emerged, which was "better educated and whose aspirations were too


140. Arthur, n.74, p.57.
complex and varied to find satisfaction in the Nationalist Party". This new generation of partymen rejected the idea of a "United Ireland", and while many of them looked for a more 'dynamic form of nationalism with National Unity', some others looked to the 'Connolly Socialism of the Republican Labour Party' and yet some others joined the Northern Ireland Labour Party.141

It was only after the formation of the Civil Rights Association in 1967, that the Nationalists realised the gravity of a serious threat to their very existence by this movement. The Civil Rights Association was a forum for all anti-Unionist Parties, irrespective of their political allegiance. Thus, by 1968-69 the Nationalist Party was at its ebb, only to be replaced by Social Democratic and Labour Party in 1970.142

THE CENTRISTS

Northern Ireland Labour Party

Prior to 1969, among all anti-Unionist Parties, the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) had been the most successful. It emerged from the trade union base grown out of the establishment of the shipbuilding industry in Belfast in the late nineteenth century.143 In the 1890s, there was just a coalition of socialist groups in Ireland as well as in Britain. But this unity among them was hampered by their conflicting attitudes towards national questions. James Connolly, the leader of the Irish Independence Movement and

141. Darby, n.47, p.98.


143. Ibid., p.68.
a socialist, presented a mixture of socialism and nationalism as an alternative to the British version. While in jail, he wrote: "the Socialists will not understand why I am here. They forget that I am an Irishman." 144

Originally, the Labour movement was in favour of the 'Home Rule'. But it changed its stand after 1923 on the 'constitutional question' in order to maintain a balance which remained till 1949.145 In December 1923, when the Labour Party candidate, Harry Midgely, contested elections from West Belfast, he lost by a relatively small margin of only 2,720 votes. Of course, this performance of the NILP was facilitated by the fact that there was no Nationalist or Sinn Fein candidate against him.146 However, the Labour victory over Sinn Fein in 1924 indicated a major swing of the Catholics of the Falls Road in favour of the NILP -- or at least in favour of "the concept of working for reforms within the structure of the new state and putting more emphasis on social and economic issues than Irish unity".147 Due to this policy and its non-sectarian attitude the NILP won its first three seats in 1925 in the Northern Ireland Parliament. Nevertheless, for them partition remained an open question. Hence, their policy was not very successful. There was constant pressure on the Party to take a stand either for or against the constitution.

During the 1930s two leaders of the NILP, Harry Midgely and Jack Beattie, dominated the Party, although they differed in their attitudes. Harry Midgely had a soft corner

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145. McAllister, n.142, p.68.
146. Farrell, n.8, p.100.
147. Ibid., pp.100-101.
for Britain and the Commonwealth, so he moved from anti-
partitionism in 1921 to the establishment of his 'Unionist'
Commonwealth Labour Party in 1942,\textsuperscript{148} whereas Beattie
campaigned for the Irish unity and took a strong anti-
partitionist line in 1930s and, by January 1945, he formed
his Federation of Labour (Ireland) Party.\textsuperscript{149} Beattie's
policy led to his expulsion from the Party twice during the
1930s, and, also to his election as Party leader in 1942.
Midgely left the NILP, when Beattie was elected Party
leader.\textsuperscript{150} In 1943, Midgely became the first non-Unionist
Cabinet Minister for Public Security. Subsequently, in 1947,
he joined the Unionist Party without consulting his Party
colleagues and became a Unionist Minister, 1949-57.\textsuperscript{151}

In April 1949, a special NILP Conference decided
in favour of the British connection with Northern Ireland --
a decision that proved to be disastrous for the NILP. In
the election that followed, all the NILP candidates were
defeated. The decision to maintain connection between
Britain and Northern Ireland and the NILP's subsequent
defeat in the election left no option for many Catholic
members but to leave the Party and form their own republican
and socialist political groups. However, the NILP could
muster the Catholic support once again after the failure of
the IRA border campaign of 1956-62.\textsuperscript{152}

Thanks to the involvement of the Dublin-based
Irish Labour Party, Jack Beattie was elected in 1951, to the
House of Commons in Westminster. But soon the Party fell
apart due to personality clashes.\textsuperscript{153} Nevertheless, it won 4

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{148} Arthur, n.74, p.58.
\textsuperscript{149} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{150} Darby, n.47, pp.99-100.
\textsuperscript{151} Arthur, n.74, pp.58-9.
\textsuperscript{152} Darby, n.47, p.100.
\textsuperscript{153} McAllister, n.142, p.69.
\end{footnotes}
seats\textsuperscript{154} in the general election of 1958 for the Northern Ireland Parliament due to the Catholic support. In this election, the NILP contested only in seven constituencies. These four seats were retained by the NILP in the 1962 general election as well. Two of these were, however, lost by it in the 1965 election.\textsuperscript{155} The real setback to the NILP came after 1958, when Frank Hanna, who was one of the Irish Labour Organisers, left it in 1958, and formed his own Independent Labour Party. Similarly, Gerry Fitt and Harry Diamond, two other members of the NILP, formed their Republican Labour Party in 1962. In the 1966 election, Gerry Fitt was elected to the Westminster. Subsequently, in 1970, Fitt left the Republican Party and joined the Social Democratic and Labour Party and became its President.\textsuperscript{156}

In spite of all these setbacks -- some very serious, indeed -- the achievements of the NILP in the 1958 and 1962 elections were commendable. As for its performance at the poll, its share of votes increased from 16.0 per cent in 1958 to 26.0 per cent in 1962.\textsuperscript{157}

It was only after May 1967 that demoralisation set in in the NILP and the Party virtually lost its direction. Its attitude towards the new Civil Rights campaign divided its ranks and made it weak and vulnerable. In May 1969 it endorsed the campaign while voting simultaneously against its involvement in it. In protest, Paddy Devlin, one of its two MPs, left it, and joined the Social Democratic and Labour Party. Eamonn McCann, a radical civil rights leader, was expelled from the Party.\textsuperscript{158} The Party's fortune ebbed steeply. In 1969, it could retain only two

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{154} Harbinson, n.89, Appendix A, p.179.
\item \textsuperscript{155} Darby, n.47, p.100.
\item \textsuperscript{156} McAllister, n.142, p.69.
\item \textsuperscript{157} Ibid., p.68.
\item \textsuperscript{158} Darby, n.47, p.101.
\end{itemize}
seats in Stormont and in the 1973 Assembly election it could win only one seat out of seventy-eight, sinking to virtual extinction by 1979.

The tortuous history of the NILP provides us with an insight into the difficult dilemmas and the labyrinthine intricacies of the opposition politics in Northern Ireland. It clearly elucidates that the question of sectarianism was throughout a central issue with the Catholic minority, and this question simply had to be dealt with and sorted out not only by the NILP but also by any other group, which sought to mobilise the Catholics of Northern Ireland. For instance, there were three clearly discernible phases of NILP activities in Northern Ireland, all in some important way connected with the issue of sectarianism, which the electorate at all time considered as central. Before 1949, the NILP ignored the issue, so it failed to mobilise any significant support. Between 1949 and mid 1960s, it took up the issue and was comparatively successful, even benefiting from the temporary improvement in the communal relations during the period. From then on, it began to take oblique postures on various issues, as a result of which it lost the initiative, and got obliterated by the events.¹⁵⁹

The decline of the NILP may be traced to various reasons. The first was an internal split on tactics. One group, led by David Bleakley and W.R. Boyd, tried to gain support from among the Protestant working class, while the other wanted to make a more direct appeal to the new Catholic votes. The latter was led by Charles Brett and Sam Napier. This seriously undermined the Party unity. Another reason was Terence O'Neill's appearance on the scene with the support of the new British Labour Government. The electoral losses of the Party and its subsequent defeat in the local government elections in 1967 added to its

¹⁵⁹. Ibid.

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emergination. The emergence of the Alliance Party was yet another blow to the Northern Ireland Labour Party.

The avowed objective of the Northern Ireland Labour Party to replace religion with class values to build a new base for mobilisation was not that easy, given the situation in Ulster. The failure of the Party to do so clearly emphasised that there was no future before a policy, which did not take full cognizance of the religious divide in the Province. In contrast, the Alliance Party took this vital factor in the Northern Ireland politics into account and subsequently placed its appeal on religion before raising the hope of uniting Catholics and Protestants within a common political framework.160 Other reasons for the decline of the NILP seem to be the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement in 1967 and the formation of the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP).

In a historical perspective, it may be seen that the Irish problem has at least a 400-year-old history, ever since the successive Governments in England began to consolidate their hold over the Catholic-dominated island by encouraging Protestants of British origin to settle down in Northern Ireland, which had a rich economic potential. The present problem of Northern Ireland is thus a remnant of this old problem. Its genesis could be traced to the almost continuous conflict between the two sects of the same religion, viz. Protestants and Catholics, that had rocked many parts of Europe in the previous centuries, taking different forms in different countries. But the Irish question became a unique one, because here, not only were the religious antagonisms co-terminus with the conflict between the economic classes, but also a relatively well off group of Protestants was foisted on the native Catholic population. But this conflict assumed serious proportions

160. McAllister, n. 142, p. 70.
and a fierce intensity only in the early part of the twentieth century, which finally led to the division of the country into two, whereby a Protestant-dominated Northern Ireland was created. But this process was far from being peaceful, for the new State of Northern Ireland was born amidst tears, tribulations and turmoil.

Given the background of the ethnic conflict, the two-thirds majority, which the Protestants enjoyed in terms of population, manifested itself in a series of discriminatory actions against the minority community on the part of voluntary organisations as well as the Government. Due to their superiority in numbers, and the peculiar voting system, which was palpably advantageous to them, the Protestants soon established an absolute control over the Government and the administration of the Province. This was naturally resented by the Catholic minority.

It will not be impertinent to mention here that a majority among the minority community was never in favour of the partition of Ireland, as they were apprehensive of the consequences of a Protestant rule, backed by a brute majority, in the Province. They rather wanted a united Ireland ruled by the Catholics. In the circumstances, the enactment of the Act of 1920 proved to be a watershed. The minority community, which began to initially unite under the umbrella of a loosely constituted Nationalist Party, refused to recognise the new State, and the anti-partitionist MPs refrained from attending the Provincial Parliament. The hard core of the Catholic protest surfaced up in many forms in subsequent years. The Special Powers Act of 1922, clearly designed to strengthen and enhance the power of the Protestant Unionists, accentuated the grievances of the minority community.

The abolition of the system of 'Proportional Representation' in 1929 became a source of widespread
discontent among the Catholics, as it confirmed their fears that the religious safeguards enshrined in the Act of 1920 were nothing more than empty words. The local government franchise system and extra-votes for the multi-property holder were also perceived as cases of clearcut discrimination. Some other festering grievances were: discrimination in the allocation of housing and municipal facilities, employment opportunities and the well-known gerrymandering of the constituencies to the convenience of prominent Unionist politicians, who controlled the Stormont.

The Unionist policy, which strode Northern Ireland for about half-a-century was based on religious lines. It operated in such a way, that the Roman Catholics began to look upon a united Ireland under Dublin as the best solution to their political and economic deprivation in the Province. On the other hand, the Unionists believed that reunification of Ireland would spell disaster for them.161

An important aspect of the problem that must not be glossed over in this context is that, despite the tripartite agreement of 1925, which stipulated that the existing borders should remain unchanged, the successive Governments in Dublin continued to harp on their demand for Irish unity and re-opening of the border issue. In Northern Ireland, this demand was sustained for long by the Nationalists and also by the Roman Catholic members elected to the Northern Ireland Parliament, who maintained that the six counties should be merged with the Irish Republic,162 which was, however, firmly opposed by the Unionists.


The brute majority of the Protestants (66 per cent of the total population) upset the numerical balance between the two communities, so it was clear that, if this situation remained unchanged, the Protestants would continue to enjoy political power indefinitely. Such fears in the Catholic mind culminated on 6 February 1967, in the formation of the Civil Rights Association, which was the joint effort of all anti-Unionist organisations to raise their voice for civil rights. These developments were, of course, not of momentous importance to the Catholics, who looked increasingly towards Dublin, rather than Westminster, and who, therefore, subsequently put forth the demand for Northern Ireland's merger with the Irish Republic, laying thus the foundation for substantial support among the Catholic masses and for the violent tactics of the IRA militants later on. The emergence of the Civil Rights Movement, which instantly received worldwide attention, was indeed a turning-point in the history of Northern Ireland.