CHAPTER II

CIVIL RIGHTS MOVEMENT AND ITS RAMIFICATIONS

Ever since the establishment of Northern Ireland, the Unionist Party dominated the political scene despite the existence of different factions in it. Through a discreet policy of economic and political discrimination, it caused alienation of the Catholics of the Province from the political mainstream. The Catholics could not but feel that their position in the Province was just that of second class citizens.

By the 1960s, the Catholic minority wanted some change in the situation not through violence but through peaceful political means. This change in their thinking was an offshoot of the failure of the IRA's border campaign during 1956-62 period. Terence O'Neill, the Unionist Northern Ireland Prime Minister, himself favoured some change but a section of his own Party and the Protestant Ultras were virulently against any concessions to the Catholic minority. As a result, the Catholics began to mobilise support within the community, especially during the 1960s, for basic civil rights.

The accumulation of Catholic grievances, especially the discrimination they experienced in the Council housing and employment, led to the formation of various organisations and pressure groups. Thus, in 1959, the National Unity was founded to ventilate the Catholic grievances. In 1963, a pressure group called Campaign for Social Justice was formed by Conn McCluskey and his wife, Patricia. Based mainly at Dungannon, they raised issues

like poor housing facilities to the Catholics, unemployment and gerrymandering in electoral boundaries. In 1964, the National Democratic Party (NDP) was formed. With the commemoration of Theobald Wolfe Tone bicentenary in Belfast, which "drew support from across the religious divide", a number of committees were set up. As a result, by mid-1964, when the commemoration was over in Belfast, Wolfe Tone Societies were formed. The strongest among them were in Dublin and Belfast. The Belfast Wolfe Tone Society, though not controlled by either the IRA or Sinn Fein, had never more than a dozen members. The idea of this Society was to "foster republicanism by educating the masses in their cultural and political heritage."

On 13-14 August 1966, a joint meeting of all Wolfe Tone Societies was held in Maghera, wherein it was decided to launch a civil rights body in Belfast. This meeting was reconvened on 29 January 1967, in which the Wolfe Tone Society and the Campaign for Social Justice expressed the need for establishing a Northern Ireland Civil Rights

4. Theobald Wolfe Tone (1763-1798) was the founder of Irish Republicanism. A Protestant barrister and strong supporter of the American and French Revolutions, he went to the United States in 1795 and France in 1796. In France he tried to persuade the Directory and Napoleon to invade Ireland but was captured on a French ship in October 1798, when he was trying to land at Lough Swilly. He was courtmartialed and sentenced to death. But he committed suicide in 1798 before the death sentence was carried out. Michael Farrell, Northern Ireland: The Orange State (London, 1980), p.348.
6. Ibid.
Association (NICRA) on the lines of the National Council for Civil Liberties in Britain.\(^7\)

Thus, a 13-person Steering Committee was elected which, in turn, selected its office-bearers on 6 February 1967. A five-point programme was also released, which aimed at: (1) defending the basic freedom of all citizens; (2) protecting the rights of the individuals; (3) highlighting all possible abuses of power; (4) demanding guarantees for freedom of speech, assembly and association; and (5) informing the public of their lawful rights.\(^8\)

When the Opposition failed to get redress of discrimination in housing and employment and acceptance of the principal of 'One man, One vote', it looked towards the new Labour Government in Westminster, which had assumed office in October 1964, for helpful intervention. It was in June 1965 that a group of backbench Labour MPs set up the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster\(^9\) to call for a Westminster enquiry into the affairs in Northern Ireland, as per Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act 1920, which said:

\[
\text{Notwithstanding...anything contained in this Act, the supreme authority of the Parliament of the United Kingdom shall remain unaffected and undiminished over all persons, matters, and things in Ireland and every part thereof.}\quad \text{(10)}
\]

\[-----------------------------
7. Farrell, n.4, p.245.
\]
In March 1966, Gerry Fitt was elected to the House of Commons in Westminster from West Belfast as a Republican Labour MP. This was of some significance, because he instantly became an intrepid spokesman for Northern Ireland's minority at Westminster and the Labour Government was sympathetic to the views expressed by him. However, as Barry White wrote, the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster "kept a constant barrage on Ulster issues, up to and during the civil rights campaign of 1968 and 1969."  

The Communist Party of Northern Ireland was also quite active in highlighting social issues like poor housing facilities, and administrative malpractices. In its programme, *Ireland, Path to Socialism*, published in 1962, it emphasised that the demand for democratic rights was one of its immediate political demands.  

There was yet another extreme Republican fringe, a remnant of those who were involved in the IRA campaign of the fifties, which was keen to increase popular participation through local agitation. This group began to articulate a socialist vision of a united Ireland, and envisaged ballot, rather than bullet, as the means of achieving it. This strategy began to gain momentum in the IRA circles as well. Meanwhile, Republican clubs were formed in the North in the mid-sixties to stimulate political activity. This served as another source of inspiration for Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) formed in 1967.

11. Farrell, n.4, p.244.
There was then the involvement of the Trade Union Movement, particularly of the Belfast and District Trades Union Council, in the Civil Rights Movement. They organised a conference in May 1965, wherein mainly trade union leaders expressed their concern about the "failure" of the Government to implement basic democratic rights guaranteed in Northern Ireland.\textsuperscript{15} They got support from members of the Campaign for Social Justice, the Communist Party, the Republicans and the Northern Ireland Labour Party.

The introduction of the Education Act 1947, had also influenced the minority community and the intellectual class.\textsuperscript{16} Therefore, for the first time, the Queen's University students took a stand against the "totalitarian" Unionist Government. While they highlighted the need for the right to freedom of political association, the NICRA held its meeting on 9 April 1967 to ratify its constitution. Thus, it was in April 1967 that the NICRA came into existence officially.

By this time, a trend towards the convergence of diverse strands of political thought was also discernible. The need for reforms was documented and published. For the first time in the history of Northern Ireland, the civil rights campaign established a united platform of all opposition parties. It began to gain mass support through public meetings and marches, although the marchers had often to face the Government's relentless efforts to 'harry and hinder' all their meetings. However, it is said that Derry saw the worst terror in 1968.\textsuperscript{17} The civil rights campaign, being a combination of various anti-partitionist parties, had emerged as a potential threat to

\begin{itemize}
\item[15.] NICRA, n.13, p.7.
\item[16.] For details, see Chapter I, p.27.
\end{itemize}
O'Neill's Unionist Government. Though the NICRA was regarded as a non-political front, yet since its inception it had been dominated by the 'left-wing Republican elements', which, according to the Cameron Commission, "were ready to use the civil rights movement to further their own purposes, and were ready to exploit grievances in order to provoke and foment, and did provoke and foment, disorder and violence in the guise of supporting a non-violent movement." 18

In the course of events, many unfortunate developments also took place, which triggered off tension in Northern Ireland. In January 1967, John Moorman, the Anglican Bishop of Ripon, was prevented by the Paisleyites from preaching in St. Anne's Protestant Cathedral in Belfast. The Paisleyites were more militant in their approach. The other militant groups like the Evangelical Protestant Society and a faction known as the Orange Voice of Freedom, also supported this move of the Paisleyites. 19

On the prevalent situation, Gerry Fitt, the Republican Labour MP, observed:

The Bishop of Ripon affair convinced many members of the British Parliament that O'Neill's Government was in the hands of the Orange extremists and incapable of controlling the turbulent mobs, who followed Paisley. (20)

On 7 March 1967, William Craig, Home Minister in the Unionist Government of Northern Ireland, used the

20. Ibid., pp.190-1.
Special Powers Act to ban the Republican Clubs. While banning a procession, scheduled for 7 March 1967, in order to celebrate the centenary of the 1867 Fenian Rebellion, and the Republican Clubs, William Craig said in the House of Commons at Stormont on 7 March 1967 that "for a month from next Monday all processions and meetings would be prohibited except those given police permission." It was feared that there would be counter-demonstrations by extreme Protestant organisations, if the Fenian Centenary processions were permitted. However, the ban imposed by Craig led to widespread protests in Northern Ireland and the NICRA publicly condemned the ban on the Republican Clubs. On 15 April 1967, in Newry, a public meeting was also organised by the NICRA in this regard. In Belfast, marches were organised by the 'left-wing students' and 'Young Socialists', which were countered by Paisley's march in Shaftesbury square. Speaking at a Connolly Association rally in London in June 1967, Gerry Fitt, a Republican Labour MP, warned, that "continuing frustration in the North would lead to violence again."

---

21. The Times (London), 8 March 1968. In 1922 the Unionist dominated Parliament passed a bill, which became the Special Powers Act. This Act gave the Minister of Home Affairs absolute power to arrest people on suspicion of endangering the State and imprison them indefinitely without trial. It also empowered him to send police into the houses of the people without warrant, impound property, suspend habeas corpus and abolish inquests.

22. Ibid.

23. Ibid.


25. Farrell, n.4, p.245.

26. Ibid.
In Northern Ireland, by 1968, pressure was growing on the Unionist Government for speedy reforms. In early 1968, the Derry Housing Action Committee (DHAC) was formed with the help of the local Republican groups in Derry and the left-wing local Labour Party, led by Eamonn McCann. The Committee was encouraging "squattings and disrupting traffic and corporation meetings."

The trouble began in Caledon, County Tyrone, in spring 1968, when two Catholic families squatted on the newly built Council houses, alleging that they were denied housing facilities. But, in June 1968, they were evicted from the houses and one of these houses was allocated to a 19-year old Protestant girl, Emily Beattie, who was the Secretary to the local Unionist Councillor's solicitor. This was characterised as a stark example of blatant discrimination against Catholic families. Since Caledon was a Unionist-dominated area and the housing allocation in each ward was effectively in the hands of the local Councillors, Catholics had only a very remote possibility of getting accommodation in that area. This incident led Austin Currie, a Nationalist MP to publicly take over Beattie's house with the help of two others on 20 June 1968. However, Currie was evicted within a few hours and fined. But the case was referred to the Dungannon-based Campaign for Social Justice by Austin Currie and, thereafter, it went to the NICRA, which planned to hold a protest march from Coalisland to Dungannon on 24 August 1968.

The prevailing situation would have probably continued till the present day, had a decision to take the struggle to the streets not been made. Street violence was

nothing new in Northern Ireland, but street politics was. Many prominent figures of Northern Ireland joined a protest march held on 24 August. Among them were Austin Currie; Gerry Fitt, Republican Labour MP; Betty Sinclair, Chairman of the Civil Rights Association; and Bernadette Devlin, a young student of Queen's University. The demonstration passed off peacefully despite the threat from Paisley's Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV), who planned a counter-demonstration. This was the first ever civil rights march in Northern Ireland. According to Max Hastings, "By the standard of America or the rest of Europe, this had been less a demonstration than an organised walk." Nevertheless, the march gathered 2,500 people, twice the population of Coalisland, which surprised even the organisers.

The second demonstration was, however, a disaster. A march in Derry was planned for 5 October 1968 by the NICRA. The route chosen was along the business streets from the Waterside Station on the East Side of the River Foyle, across Craigvon Bridge and to the Dimond in the centre of the city. The help of local organisations like the Derry Housing action Committee, the Londonderry Labour Party, the James Connolly Republican club and the older men of the Derry Nationalist Party was sought. Though the local

28. The Ulster Protestant Volunteers (UPV), which was founded by Paisley in 1966, remained active till 1969. Despite its military title and structure and the fact that it was controlled by an 'Ulster Constitution Defence Committee' (UCDC), Paisley maintained that the UPV did not believe in the use of force. Its membership overlapped considerably with that of the UVF.

29. Hastings, n.27, p.46.


Nationalist Party refrained from taking part in the march, after a good deal of persuasion by the march leaders, Eddie McAteer, the Nationalist leader, stood in the frontline of the march on 5 October 1968.32

Till then, no anti-Unionist procession had ever gone through the walled city in Derry. In protest against the march, two letters were given to the concerned authorities by the local Unionist Organisations in Derry, and a third protest letter came from the Protestant Apprentice Boys33 of Derry on 30 September 1968. These letters alleged that the "march was merely a cover for a Republican and Nationalist parade."34 Yet, on 1 October, only four days before the Civil Rights march, the Protestant Apprentice Boys gave a notice to the effect that its 'Annual Initiation Ceremony' would be held on the same day, at the same time, and also along the same route as the Civil Rights march.35 It is important to note that no such "annual" ceremonial parade had been held by them till then. William Craig, Home Minister, ordered a ban on all the parades on 5 October 1968 within the walls or in the waterside ward to the east across the River Foyle in Londonderry. Justifying his order, Craig said, that "the march would clash with a traditional Orange demonstration, which had been arranged for the day. In fact, it was evident that the latter had been arranged hastily as a device to be used against NICRA plans."36

32. Ibid.
33. A Protestant Orange Society, based in Derry, decided to commemorate the action of the Protestant apprentices, who, in 1688, secured the city for Williamite cause by closing the gates against the forces of James II.
34. Hastings, n.27, p.50.
35. Ibid.
In spite of the ban, thousands of marchers assembled on 5 October 1968 and the procession went ahead along the original route. But they were stopped by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). To prevent the civil rights march from going ahead, elaborate measures were taken by the administration on the planned route. Barriers were set up at important junctions like Duke Street and Craigvon Bridge and the RUC forces were deployed in strength in these sensitive areas. In spite of the warning by the County Inspector, Meharg, that the Civil Rights marchers would be flouting the law, if they took the route to enter the Walled city, they went ahead and breached the barrier. The inevitable head-on collision occurred and the marchers were batoned severely as they were caught between two lines of police. Further, in order to disperse them they were hosed down with water cannons. The RUC came down on the marchers heavily, throwing to wind all restraint. This is evident from the fact that, along with scores of others, even prominent leaders like Eddie McAteer and Gerry Fitt were injured in the attack. The RUC spared nobody.

The police action on Civil Rights marchers in Derry attracted widespread attention in many parts of the world. Besides mass arrests in the action, at least 77 civilians were injured. The police excess on the marchers was testified by several wellknown citizens. Anne Kerr, a British Labour MP, who took part in the march, said that it was far worse than anything she had witnessed a few weeks earlier in the riots in the wake of elections in Chicago.

Whatever indignities the NICRA suffered, Terence O'Neill and his Unionist party suffered more in terms of image. Television cameras recorded the barbarous water

37. The Times, 7 October 1968.
38. Ibid., and also see Boyd, n.19, p.196.
hosing and batoning of unarmed men and women by the police. According to O'Leary:

The Hungarian Revolution of 1956 was sparked off by demonstrations in support of the Polish demonstrations of the previous month, so the Dungannon led to the event of October 5 in Londonderry, with police baton charges and water cannon in plentiful supply. (39)

The Derry incident gave birth to Derry Citizens' Action Committee, which was formed on 9 October 1968 with a membership of sixteen. Its aim was similar to that of the Civil Rights Association, viz "to restrain from mob-violence" and to use "non-violent" methods to achieve its goal. John Hume, a school teacher, became its first Chairman and with him closely associated was Ivan Cooper, a local Protestant. (40) The same day, about a thousand students set out to march to the City Hall in Belfast. The followers of Ian Paisley held a counter-demonstration at Shaftesbury Square. The students' demonstration was, however, re-routed by the RUC. It proceeded without any incident. Two days later, i.e., on 11 October 1968, the People's Democracy was formed. It was a loose organisation committed to civil rights reforms, but it had a tough, young socialist hard core. It was expected to become the driving force of the Civil Rights movement. (41) The early leadership of the People's Democracy was provided by persons like Michael Farrell (a young lecturer at Belfast College of Technology), Eamonn McCann, Cyril Toman, Kevin Boyle and Bernadette Devlin. (42) It drew support from a small group of students at


41. Farrell, n. 4, p. 247.

42. Hastings, n. 27, p. 64.
the Queen's University, Belfast. When the first march was held under the banner of the People's Democracy (16 October 1968), 1,300 persons took part in it.\textsuperscript{43} Basically a leftist student-based civil rights organisation, the People's Democracy, played a leading role in organising popular resistance in the ghettos of Northern Ireland after the introduction of internment in 1971. It was the only leftist organisation, which gave support to the military campaign of the Provisionals.\textsuperscript{44}

The People's Democracy came out with six demands, which were "sloganised into an appeal leaflet illustrating its civil rights nature". These demands were: (i) One man One Vote; (ii) Fair Boundaries; (iii) Houses on Need; (iv) Jobs on Merit; (v) Free Speech; and (vi) Repeal of the Special Powers Act.\textsuperscript{45}

On 15 October 1968, the Nationalists took a major decision to withdraw from official opposition in Stormont, and the next day the People's Democracy held its first march in Belfast to the City Hall. This made Craig ban once again all the marches inside the walled City for a month. Derry saw nevertheless another demonstration on 16 November 1968 on the original route. The marchers went on violating the ban order from the Waterside, across the Craigvon Bridge and into the Diamond, where they were addressed by their leaders.\textsuperscript{46} This march was organised by the Derry Citizens' Action Committee under the leadership of John Hume and Ivan Cooper. A new demand was now raised at the civil right marches: "Craig Out."\textsuperscript{47}

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Farrell, n.4, p.358.
\textsuperscript{45} Arthur, n.1, p.30.
\textsuperscript{46} Heatley, n.31, p.10.
\textsuperscript{47} NICRA, n.13, p.14.
The Unionist Government seemed to be on the defensive. O'Neill faced difficulties on several fronts. Inside the Cabinet, there was opposition to Craig's heavy-handed tactics in dealing with the first Derry march. This opposition emanated not from humanitarian considerations, but from the adverse publicity received by the incidents. O'Neill was also in difficulty with the extreme right wing of his own party in Stormont, which expressed its disapproval in the form of street demonstrations by Paisely and his followers. Relations between the Catholic community and O'Neill were also deteriorating and the RUC had destroyed what O'Neill had built up after years of hard work. But O'Neill's worst difficulty lay in his relations with Westminster. The Campaign for Democracy in Ulster had prepared the groundwork for concern about civil rights in Northern Ireland and the injury on Gerry Fitt's head brought the issue to the fore in the House of Commons. Westminster was deeply concerned with lack of peace. On 4 November 1968, Prime Minister Harold Wilson summoned O'Neill to London and, on 5 November 1968, he assured the Commons that he had discussed all the major issues with O'Neill and had urged him to take speedy action.

On 22 November 1968, O'Neill came out with a 5-point reform programme. The five points were: (i) Derry Corporation would be abolished and replaced by a nominated Commission; (ii) there would be an Ombudsman; (iii) local authorities would be encouraged to adopt a point system for allocating houses; (iv) the company vote would be abolished for local elections; and (v) the Government would consider

suspending parts of the Special Powers Act. The 5-point programme failed, however, to satisfy the Catholics, because it was "too little and too late" for them. Furthermore, it did not even touch the key issue of civil rights demand of 'One man, One vote', and promised to remove only those parts of the Special Powers Act, which conflicted with international obligations and that too only when this could be done without undue hazard.

O’Neill, defended firmly the police action of 5 October 1968 in Derry, saying: 'The police had no alternative. If this march by Nationalists into a Unionist area had been allowed, we should not have been reading about scratches and bruises, but also fatal casualties.' He concedes, however, in his memoirs that: 'Any liberal-minded person must admit, that the Civil Rights movement brought about reforms, which would otherwise have taken years to wring from a reluctant government.'

O’Neill did not concede the demand for 'One man, One vote', so NICRA decided to hold another demonstration on 30 November 1968 in the Armagh city centre. But the route of the demonstration was blocked and a meeting was held at the RUC barrier. Ian Paisley, by now the Chairman of an anti-O’Neill organisation, the Ulster Constitution Defence Committee, and Ronald Bunting, a retired Army Major, who was his right-hand man, threatened a counter-demonstration in Armagh and elsewhere. This, and William Craig’s speech in December 1968, wherein he declared that "when you have a

---

50. The Times, 23 November 1968.


52. Hastings, n.27, p.60.

Roman Catholic majority you have a lesser standard of democracy jeopardised O'Neill's bridge-building measures.54

On 9 December 1968, in a television broadcast, O'Neill made a fervent appeal for peace. He said:

Ulster stands at the crossroads. I believe you know me well enough by now to appreciate that I am not a man given to extravagant language. But I must say to you this evening that our conduct over the coming days and weeks will decide our future.... In Londonderry and other places recently, a minority of agitators determined to subvert lawful authority played a part in setting light to highly inflammable material. But the tinder for that fire, in the form of grievances, real or imaginary, had been piling up for years. And so I saw it as my duty to do two things. First, to be firm in the maintenance of law and order, and resisting those elements which seek to profit from any disturbances. Second, to ally firmness with fairness, and to look for any underlying causes of dissension which were troubling decent and moderate people...(55)

It seems that O'Neill once again gained the support of Ulster's moderates. But Craig attacked his speech and questioned O'Neill's views on Westminster's role on the very next day. Craig said:

There has been much talk on our constitutional position and reference to Section 75 of the Government of Ireland Act. I think far too much is being read into that Section, and I would resist any effort by any government in Great Britain, whatever its complexion might be, to exercise that power in any way to interfere with the proper jurisdiction of the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland. It is merely a

----------------------


reserve power to deal with an emergency situation, and it is difficult to envisage any situation, in which it could be exercised without the consent of the Parliament and Government of Northern Ireland. (56)

The following day, i.e., on 11 December 1968, Craig was dismissed by O’Neill. By this time, many Catholics felt flattered at the idea of a Unionist Prime Minister appealing directly to them. (57) There were two reactions to Craig’s speech and his dismissal. The People’s Democracy decided to form a number of extra-mural branches as soon as the reforms were announced, and the following day, for example, they held a meeting in Dungannon to gloat over Craig’s dismissal. The NICRA reaction was, however, much different. Suspending all protests for a month, it decided to give O’Neill one last chance. (58)

SPLIT IN THE MOVEMENT

However, the movement saw a virtual split. The issues, like ‘One Man - One Vote’ and the ‘Special Powers Act’, were once again at the forefront of the movement. Those who adopted more radical form of action believed, that it would be unwise to abandon the campaign before it had achieved its objectives. (59) On the other hand, liberal elements viewed the dismissal of Craig and the reforms, as evidences of the Government’s “good intentions”. They thought that a suspension of marches should be accepted to enable the Government to introduce further reforms. (60)

56. Wallace, n.54, p.31.
57. The Times, 12 December 1968.
58. NICRA, n.13, p.15.
60. Ibid.
The liberal gesture, could not however, satisfy the more militant groups like the Young Socialist Alliance and People's Democracy. For them, O'Neill's reforms were "too little and too late". Further, their decision to hold the march from Belfast to Londonderry, a distance of 75 miles, from 1 to 4 January 1969, put the Catholics and Protestants throughout Northern Ireland in a quandary. According to Farrell: "The march was denounced by every establishment organ, by almost the entire middle class, Catholic as well as Protestant, and by Eddie McAteer." However, the most prominent leaders who attended the march were Michael Farrell, Loudon Seth, Kevin Boyle, Cyril Toman and Bernadette Devlin. On the eve of the march, Bernadette Devlin stated unequivocally:

Our function in marching from Belfast to Derry was to break the truce, to re-launch the Civil Rights movement and to show the people that O'Neill was, in fact, offering them nothing. What we really wanted to do was to pull the carpet off the floor to show the dirt that was under it so that we could sweep it up. (63)

William Long, who had replaced Craig as Home Minister, tried hard to dissuade the leaders from undertaking the march, but in vain. On 1 January 1969, the march started from the City Hall in Belfast. The

61. The Young Socialist Alliance lay dormant during the early months of the People's Democracy's existence. It was a Queen's University-based group, which had already decided to hold a march at the beginning of the New Year. This group held regular meetings, but, since its membership belonged to the People's Democracy, it did not promote any demonstration of its own. Its role appears to have been that of a left-wing lever on the PD decisions.


Paisleyites also followed the marchers with a Union Jack ostensibly to "harry and hinder" the march, although, after covering a mile or two, they gave up the idea and the marchers passed three days without any major untoward incident. On 4 January, however, some 500 marchers were ambushed and attacked at Burntollet Bridge, near Claudy, County Londonderry, by a Protestant mob, armed with cudgels, iron bars, etc.64 As a result, the unarmed marchers had to undergo a lot of suffering and some of them were taken to hospital. The B-Specials and the Royal Ulster Constabulary, apart from Protestant mobs, invaded the Catholic ghettos. The attack on the marchers, left no doubt whatsoever that it was a trap.65

The unilateral decision of the People's Democracy to march from Belfast to Derry and further attacks on the marchers by Protestant mobs at Burntollet Bridge extinguished the lingering hope for the movement to remain non-violent. The campaign became more radical. According to Max Hastings: "The political thinking, which inspired the 1 January march, was very naive, whatever justice of the cause they sought to promote."66

O'Neill, till now silent, issued a statement on 5 January 1969, criticising the "marchers rather than their attackers". He said:

Northern Ireland had heard enough about civic rights, it was time to hear a little about civic responsibilities.... The March to Londonderry planned by the so-called People's Democracy was from the outset a foolhardy and irresponsible undertaking. At best, those who planned it were careless of the effects which it would have. At

--------------------------

64. The Times, 2 and 6 January 1969.
65. Ibid., 6 January 1969.
66. Hastings, n.27, p.81.
worst they embraced with enthusiasm the prospect of publicity causing further damage to the interests of Northern Ireland as a whole. (67)

The moderate group of Catholics, who had supported O'Neill hitherto, withdrew their support and once again "One Man - One Vote" issue came to the fore. On 11 January 1969, riots broke out again in Newry, County Down. Subsequently, after a six-hour lengthy Cabinet meeting on 15 January 1969, O'Neill announced a government Commission to investigate the nature and cause of the violence of 1968 - 69. The Commission was composed of a Scottish judge, Lord Cameron, and two local academics -- one Catholic and one Protestant. (68) On this issue, Brian Faulkner, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Commerce of O'Neill's Cabinet, resigned on 23 January 1969, followed by William Morgan, Minister for Health and Social Services. (69) On 24 February 1969, O'Neill dissolved the Parliament and called for a general election (though the general election was due only in 1970).

With the general election in Northern Ireland held on 24 February 1969, O'Neill came to power with a reduced majority. O'Neill had less than an absolute majority in his own constituency Bannside, -- O'Neill, Unionist, got 7,745 votes, whereas Ian Paisley, Protestant Unionist, got 6,331, and Michael Farrell, People's Democracy, got 2,310 votes. The overall result was as follows: (70)

68. Ibid., 16 January 1969.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Seats</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unionist</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nationalist</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NILP</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Republican Labour</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>National Democratic</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>52</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most significant outcome of this election was the return of three civil rights leaders: John Hume, who ousted Eddie McAteer; Ivan Cooper, a Protestant, who contested from mid-Derry ousting a Nationalist; and John O'Hanlon, who won from South Armagh. 71 No Protestant Unionist (Paisley's Party) or People's Democracy candidate was successful. 72 Losing most of the left-wing militants to the PD, the NILP had no chance of making any impact. As a result of this, it lost its seat in Pottinger, whereas it was successful in retaining Oldpark seat and narrowly won in Falls, where its candidate, Peddy Devlin, had been active in the Civil Rights movement. 73

The "long march" and the February election proved to be a watershed in the People's Democracy's development. As a group, it was never again to win so much popular support, and as a ginger group within the Civil Rights movement its influence began to wane. 74

71. Ibid.
72. Wallace, n.54, p.33.
73. Farrell, n.4, p.254.
The People's Democracy continued to bank on the "politics of the streets". Hence it failed to attract more students. It also failed to strike root in any urban or rural areas, except in Armagh and Fermagh. 75

On the other hand, the success of the members of the Civil Rights Movement in elections showed a different trend. It is true that hitherto the strategy had been that of street politics; but after the electoral success of three Civil Rights members it moved on towards parliamentary politics, which had created confidence among the common people that civil rights would be won for everybody in Northern Ireland. In tune with this new approach, the Derry Citizens' Action Committee kept their supporters off the streets for sometime. 76

Stormont re-assembled, on 28 February 1969, to consider O'Neill's position as leader. Of the 39 Unionist MPs, 24 were Official (pro-O'Neill) and three Unofficial (pro-O'Neill) while ten were Official (anti-O'Neill) and two Official (unclear in their attitude to the premier). O'Neill survived and was re-elected leader by 23 votes to one (Faulkner was against), and one abstention (William Craig), while ten of O'Neill's opponents preferred to walk out before the voting took place. 77 With this, O'Neill introduced on 12 March the Public Order Bill, which required "longer notice of parades, outlawing counter-demonstrations and civil disobedience tactics." 78 This did not, however, deter the NICRA from giving calls for

75. Ibid.

76. Hastings, n.27, p.106.

77. The Times, 1 March 1969.

demonstrations. On 22 March, it organised demonstrations against the Public Order Bill in six towns simultaneously and the opposition MPs organised a sit-down simultaneously in the Parliament at Stormont. This demonstration indicated that the militant civil rights campaign enjoyed the full support of the minority community.

Meanwhile, a number of explosions took place, which damaged water and electricity installations. Fires too were seen in many Belfast Post Offices. The IRA was blamed instantaneously for all these. Later on, it was, however, established that they were the handiwork of the Protestant extremists and the UVF.

On 17 April 1969, in a by-election for the mid-Ulster seat at Westminster, the People's Democracy candidate, Bernadette Devlin, defeated the Unionist candidate, Anna Forrest, with a sizable margin (Devlin, 33,648 votes; Anna Forrest, 29,437 votes). 

The NICRA and the PD organised a series of demonstrations and protest marches in Belfast against the minor riot in Derry with the RUC. This time William Street and Bogside were the target. This led the Home Minister to order the withdrawal of the RUC. The IRA, which till now had been silent, came in full swing and placed bombs in a number of Post Offices in Belfast. Unrest was manifest in County Down as well. Under pressure, O'Neill, was obliged

79. Farrell, n.4, p.254.
80. Wallace, n.54, p.33.
81. Ibid.
82. Farrell, n.4, p.255.
83. The Times, 19 April 1969.
84. Farrell, n.4, p.255.
to accept the principle of "One Man, One Vote" at the Unionist Parliamentary Party meeting held on 22 April 1969. The same day Bernadette Devlin made her maiden speech in the Commons at Westminster. 85

The announcement to introduce "One Man, One Vote", in the next local government election proved disastrous for O'Neill. For him, however, it was the last trump card. Following the announcement Chichester Clark, the Minister of Agriculture and O'Neill's cousin, resigned next morning. This was a blow to O'Neill. Nevertheless, when the Unionist Parliamentary Party met on 23 April, it passed the principle of 'One Man, One Vote', in municipal elections by a narrow margin of six votes (28 votes to 22). 86

On 28 April 1969, when the Unionist Council meeting was held, O'Neill stepped down from the Premiership of Northern Ireland and from the leadership of the Unionist Party. Appearing on television, he said: "...I have tried to break the chains of ancient hatreds. I have been unable to realize during my period of office all that I had sought to achieve. Whether, now, it can be achieved in my life-time I do not know. But one day these things will be, and must be, achieved." 87

Whatever the causes of O'Neill's downfall, as Harbinson said, his "contribution to Ulster Unionism was that he tried to break what he described as 'the balance of hatred' between the communities. His argument was that if Ulster accepted the benefits of Union with Great Britain, it must also accept the same standards. If these included

86. The Times, 24 April 1969.
87. Ibid., 30 April 1969.
civil rights for all citizens, then such rights had to be granted. However, he did not succeed, as he himself confessed in his TV swan song, about in bringing about harmony between the two communities.

THE BRITISH INTERVENTION

Following O'Neill's resignation, Chichester Clark became the Prime Minister on 1 May 1969. He defeated Brian Faulkner by a margin of one vote and following O'Neill's policy, re-appointed most of the Ministers of the erstwhile Cabinet.

In a gracious gesture, Chichester Clark announced amnesty for all offences of political protest committed since 5 October 1968. Besides, he accepted the principle of "One Man, One Vote", which, incidentally was the issue on which he resigned from O'Neill's government. Ian Paisley and Ronald Bunting, who had been put into jail, were released, and prosecution proceedings were dropped against those Civil Rights leaders and militant Protestants, including the RUC and B-Specials, who were involved in Burntollet ambush. Chichester Clark believed that this gesture would help bring an end to murder and mayhem of innocents in Northern Ireland.

However noble Chichester Clark's intentions may have been, he could not prevent street fighting either between the two communities or between the rioters and the police. Having given the Government sufficient time, the

88. Harbinson, n.78, p.154.
89. The Times, 2 and 5 May 1969.
90. Ibid., 2 May 1969.
92. Wallace, n.54, p.34.

80
NICRA announced on 1 June 1969 its return to the streets, with a timetable for major civil rights reforms. Their demands on the Government were: (i) One man, one vote in local government elections; (ii) Votes at 18 in both local government and parliamentary franchise; (iii) An independent Boundary Commission to draw up fair electoral boundaries; (iv) A compulsory points system for housing; (v) Administrative machinery to remedy local government grievances; (vi) Legislation, which would outlaw discrimination, especially in employment; and (vii) Abolition of the Special Powers Act and disbandment of the B-Specials. But the Unionist Government continued to prove either its incapability or unwillingness to act on the civil rights demands. Westminster hoped that everything would settle down peacefully again, but the problem remained. On 28 June 1969 the first of the "post-truce" civil rights marches took place in Strabane.

The following week, on 5 July, the NICRA held another march in Newry. The marchers passed peacefully through the intended route of the January march, but this march caused growing strains on the PD-NICRA relationship. As the rift between the PD and the NICRA widened violence erupted in several parts of Northern Ireland. The head-on collision came on 12 July 1969, when the Orange parade, which had been allowed to march in Derry, was stoned. Riots flared up in Derry, Dungiven and Lurgan. In Dungiven, the Orange Hall was burnt down and several police tenders were wrecked by angry Catholics. The RUC swung into baton-charge, killing Francis McCloskey, a 66-year-old Catholic. In Derry, riots lasted three days; two civilians were wounded by bullet shots from the police. A similar kind of rioting

---

93. NICRA, n.13, p.20.
94. Ibid., pp.20-21.
95. Ibid., p.21.
96. The Times, 14 July 1969.
took place on 2 August 1969, when an Orange march passed through a Catholic area in Belfast, in which one Catholic died due to police beating. It too lasted three days.\textsuperscript{97}

The NICRA's position as a mass movement on the streets became hopeless. According to a NICRA account:

\begin{quote}
In Dungannon, on 11 August, for example, 100 members of NICRA picketed a meeting of the local Council in protest against its housing policy. An event, which six months previously would have received little opposition from the Unionist population, was met with a hostile crowd and violence eventually broke out. The RUC batoned the civil rights pickets and arrested 15 of them. Civil Rights protest had become identified as being Catholic in the increasing sectarian violence and the RUC joined in vigorously on the Protestant side.\textsuperscript{98}
\end{quote}

What happened during the course of these troubles smacked totally of sectarian orientation. The Civil Rights leaders tried to bring about peace but to no avail. In the opinion of Eamonn McCann, Chairman of Derry Labour Party:

"This has nothing to do with civil rights. The old primeval instincts have come to the surface. It is a religious war, aggravated by the massive Catholic unemployment figures in Derry and by the bad housing conditions in the Bogside."\textsuperscript{99}

The Derry Citizens' Action Committee also condemned looting and hooliganism.\textsuperscript{100} The PD march, which was proposed for 26 July 1969 in Fermanagh, was banned and 37 PD supporters were arrested.\textsuperscript{101}

The British troops had already moved into Northern Ireland in April 1969, following bomb explosions in the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 3, 4 and 5 August 1969.
\textsuperscript{98} NICRA, n.13, p.21.
\textsuperscript{99} The Times, 14 July 1969.
\textsuperscript{100} Hastings, n.27, p.124.
\textsuperscript{101} Farrell, n.4, p.258.
\end{flushright}
Province. The Minister of Defence, Denis Healey, announced on 20 April 1969 that 550 troops would be dispatched to Northern Ireland, not to "quell the demonstration" or "maintain the public order" but to guard the "electricity and water installations."\(^{102}\) During the first week of August 1969, troops were moved into the RUC headquarters as standby for use in Belfast. However, the moot point is that, for the first time, the British Government got directly involved in Northern Ireland's affairs by sending the troops, which raised questions about Northern Ireland's constitutional status.\(^{103}\)

The riot on 12 August 1969 proved to be even more disastrous. Thousands of Orangemen had come from all over the north to celebrate their "annual march".\(^{104}\) The Government was aware of the looming danger, but the march was allowed to take place. As the Apprentice Boys of Derry were passing the Bogside area, the situation became explosive; the Catholics, who had taken refuge behind the barricades, started hurling stones and missiles at the police. This led to a serious confrontation between the Roman Catholics and the RUC. The riot lasted for three days. To quell it, the CS gas was used by the police for the first time. Even civil rights stalwarts like John Hume, Eddie


\(^{103}\) Arthur, n. 3, p. 109.

\(^{104}\) The Times, 13 August 1969. On 12 July every year the Protestants demonstrate to commemorate the victory in 1690 of the Protestant King William III over the Catholic James II. The 12 August march was, however, to celebrate the liberation of the Derry City from a 105-day siege laid by the same James II in 1689.
McAteer and Ivan Cooper’s appeals for peace were ignored. Meanwhile, the leadership of the PD passed into the hands of the "Republican and left-wing activists". At the same time, the NICRA and the People’s Democracy decided to hold "mass rallies" only to divert the police from the Bogside, which led to outbreak of violence everywhere. The worst riots were witnessed in Dungannon and Belfast. By the end of the week, eight persons were dead -- seven in Belfast and one in Armagh -- and hundreds were hospitalised. In Dublin, John Lynch’s Government took an alarming view of it, calling for UN peace keeping force in the six Counties and their re-unification with Southern Ireland.

The British troops moved into Derry and Belfast in August 1969. The IRA and PD put forth a set of demands before the barricades were pulled down in Catholic areas. These demands were: "Stormont must be suspended, the RUC disarmed, the B-Specials disbanded and the Special Powers Act revoked." The movement of British troops into Derry and Belfast was at first welcomed by the Catholics, paving the way for direct British intervention.

On 19 August 1969, Prime Minister, Chichester Clark, the Deputy Prime Minister, J.L.O. Andrews, the Minister of Home Affairs, R.W. Porter and the Minister for Development, Brain Faulkner, met the British Prime Minister, Harold Wilson, the Home Secretary James Callaghan, the Secretary of State for Defence, Denis Healey, and the Minister of State at the Home Office, Lord Stonham, at 10

105. Ibid., 13, 14 and 15 August 1969. The CS gas is an anti-riot irritant, which makes a person pretty sick. It had been used earlier in wars as well.

106. Ibid.

107. Ibid., 18 August 1969.

108. Wallace, n.54, p.36.
Downing Street in London. It was agreed that the "GOC Northern Ireland will...assume overall responsibility for security operations." Further, two civil servants would be temporarily stationed at Stormont to handle the Stormont Government. On the constitutional aspect, it was declared in the Communique that, "in no event will Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be part of the United Kingdom without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland. The border is not an issue." The Communique announced the intention of the Northern Ireland Government to "set up an impartial investigation into the recent grave public disorders". Later in that month a committee headed by Lord Scarman was set up to inquire into July-August riots, and the acts of sabotage in April 1969, which included explosions in water and electricity installations and petrol bomb attacks on a number of post offices in Belfast. Further, on 26 August 1969, a committee headed by Lord John Hunt was constituted to examine the recruitment, organisation, structure and composition of the Ulster police (the RUC and B-Specials).

Things were moving fast in 1969. First came the publication of the Report of the Cameron Commission on 12 September 1969. It may be mentioned that this Commission was appointed by O'Neill. The Commission reported that, "there was discrimination and gerrymandering against Catholics", which vindicated the civil rights movement. It said that there had been "serious breaches of discipline and acts of


110. Ibid., p.3.

111. Ibid., p.2.

illegal violence" by the RUC during the Civil Rights campaign and it described the B-Specials as a "partisan and para-military force recruited exclusively from Protestants."\(^{113}\)

On 8 October 1969, the Home Secretary, James Callaghan, accompanied by the Minister of State, Home Office, Lord Stonham, visited Belfast. After a series of meetings with the Northern Ireland Cabinet on 9-10 October 1969, both the Governments issued a Communique, which concluded:

The Ministers of both Governments agreed that the decisions made following the report of the Police Advisory Committee, together with the measures designed to stimulate the economy of the Province, and the steps taken by the Northern Ireland Government to ensure a common standard of citizenship, constituted a comprehensive programme of reform, which gave to all citizens of Northern Ireland the opportunity to live in harmony and prosperity and deserved the full support of everyone.\(^{114}\)

The Hunt Committee Report was published on 10 October 1969. It recommended that: the B-Specials should be disbanded; the regular police should be relieved of all duties of a para-military nature as soon as possible; and the RUC should become an unarmed police force. It also recommended the creation of a Volunteer Reserve Force, one third of which should be replaced each year. Further, no officer should command it for more than three years. The Report also recommended that the police should come under a new police authority, whose membership should reflect the

\(^{113}\) Cameron Report, n.18, p.1-ff.

composition of different groups in the community, particularly the Catholic.\footnote{115}

Commenting on the Report, Chichester Clark said: "In particular, we accept the principle of a civilized and normally unarmed Royal Ulster Constabulary....We agree that the Ulster Special Constabulary should be replaced."\footnote{116} The publication of the Hunt Committee Report led to the resignation of Anthony Peacock, the Inspector General of Police of the RUC. He was replaced by Arthur Young, Commissioner of the City of London Police.\footnote{117}

A number of reform programmes were carried out by the Chichester Clark Government. A Commissioner for Complaints was established "to deal with complaints of maladministration". A Ministry of Community Relations was established to "assist local bodies concerned with community relations." The new police organisation was instituted by the Northern Ireland Parliament in March 1970, while the Ulster Defence Regiment, which was set up by the British Government, became operational with effect from 1 April 1970.\footnote{118}

It was decided in October 1969 to set up a Central Housing Authority. In view of this decision and of the proposals for reshaping local government, a review body was appointed on 7 December 1969 under the Chairmanship of Patrick Macrory, which submitted its report on 28 May

\footnote{116. Hastings, n.27, p.180.}
\footnote{117. The Times, 11 October 1969.}
Almost all the Unionist supporters were surprised by the acceptance of the Hunt Report. Their resentment manifested itself in the renewed violence in Belfast, which initially occurred at the Shankill Road. In a scuffle between the army and the loyalists, one RUC member and two Protestants lost their lives. As a result, on 12 October 1969 the army embarked upon a massive combing and search operation in the Shankill Road area. Sporadic violence continued throughout the year. Another consequence of the Army intervention was that the barricades in the Catholic ghettos were pulled down. The civil rights movement too sank into disarray. The clash of wills and interests between different sections of it came to the fore, leading to even deeper divisions in the already patchwork organisation. At the same time, the demand of the militants for more and faster reforms and actions by the government did not, in the aftermath of the disturbances, evoke whole-hearted support from the Catholic community. The minority community, rather, itself became preoccupied with regaining a measure of normalcy out of the widespread dislocation and chaos in its ranks. In the event, the action of the militants only served to further foment internal dissension. In fact, Conn McCluskey, a major inspiration behind the Campaign for Social Justice in Dungannon, which was also instrumental in setting the Civil Rights Movement in motion, warned that the unaccomodative attitude of the extremist elements in the Civil Rights Association Executive could lead to the subversion of the very nature and complexion of Catholic protest.

120. The Times, 13 October 1969.
121. Hastings, n.27, pp.192-3.
At the 1970 Annual General Meeting (AGM) of the NICRA, McCluskey of Campaign for Social Justice withdrew from the membership of the NICRA and so did the People's Democracy, which had been the "original cause of the split in the civil rights movement,"122 due to its left-wing politics. Fissiparous tendencies were also visible in the Republican movement by August 1969. Among the two groups of the Republicans, the "Official" wing retained the membership of the NICRA while the "Provisional" one eschewed it.123 However, according to Martin Wallace:

The success of the civil rights movement stemmed partly from the fact that it concentrated less on issues of personal liberty...and more on pressing social problems like housing and employment. The target was less the Unionist Government than the Unionist-controlled Councils; Catholic resentment was organised, not for the traditional and seemingly unattainable objective of Irish Unity, but towards clear social goals.(124)

The NICRA's success on civil rights issues led to the decline of the NICRA as a mass movement. Not surprising therefore that after 1970 its role was taken over by the newly formed political parties. With the assumption of power by the Conservative Government in Britain after the general election in June 1970, the prospects of civil rights became dim. Street violence continued throughout the year in the midst of the demand for Bill of Rights. The escalating violence led to the introduction of internment without trial on 9 August 1971. Several hundred people were arrested and held without charge or trial. Instantly, the


123. Ibid.


89
NICRA called for a campaign of civil disobedience to protest against 'military terrorism; and sought for it the support of the Opposition MPs and political groups'. The civil disobedience, initially in the form of non-payment of rents and taxes, grew to encompass later on all other forms of financial non-cooperation with the Government Departments.

When the dust settled down after three weeks of post-internment violence, the NICRA found itself in the same position in which it had been in the pre-internment period. The period between August 1971 and February 1972 was the last one, when the NICRA occupied the centre of Northern Ireland's political stage. Internment created a political vacuum, which the NICRA was able to fill partly due to the nature of its broad-based demands.

Considering the facts cited above, it could be said that the disturbances of 1968-69 were the expressions and responses of the Catholic grievances, which were channelled through civil rights movement. In the beginning, the civil rights campaign remained non-violent until it met with Protestant violence. Terence O'Neill had initiated the reform programme by replacing Derry City Council with a Development Commission composed of Protestants and Catholics, by establishing an Ombudsman and by abolishing the unfair company vote. Thanks, to the stiff opposition of extreme Unionists, he had to pay the price for it by quitting the premiership. Other reforms like adoption of a point system for allocation of houses and suspension of the parts of the Special Powers Act were carried out by his successors in the teeth of severe opposition from the Protestants and intervention from Westminster.

125. The Times, 10 August 1971.
126. Wallace, n.124, p.34.
The failure of the Nationalists, the largest Opposition Party, to highlight the Catholic grievances, led to the birth of the NICRA, which was largely a combination of all anti-Unionist opposition forces in 1967. And the grievances the Catholics had expressed through the civil rights campaign were considered reasonable and genuine. However, a notable factor of the civil rights campaign was that it received worldwide attention, which partly led the British Government to intervene directly in the affairs of Northern Ireland.

Another major achievement of the NICRA was that its prominent leaders like John Hume, Ivan Cooper, Paddy Devlin and Paddy O'Hanlon had found their place in the Westminster Parliament. All were elected on civil rights tickets with the avowed objective of fighting for civil rights ideals. Gerry Fitt and Austin Currie were two other leaders who gave the NICRA a new dimension by means of their active participation for reforms in Northern Ireland. The most vociferous demand of the Catholic minority for "One Man, One Vote" was achieved. Its other demands like disbandment of B-Specials and disarming of the RUC were likewise achieved. Establishment of the Ministry of Community Relations, a Community Relations Commission and a Commissioner for Complaints were some of the other successes of the Civil Rights Movement. All along the movement, the NICRA maintained its non-party character.

Another consequence of the formation of the NICRA was that it gave a new dimension to the politics of Northern Ireland. Hitherto, the Opposition politics was basically anti-Unionist. But, after the emergence of the NICRA it forced all anti-Unionists to develop a wider political perspective and come out of the negative politics of simple anti-Unionism. Of course, the NICRA was also identified as anti-Unionist, but in a different sense, because the Unionist Party had taken a position against the grant of
civil rights demanded by the NICRA. Therefore, they positioned themselves one against the other. Similarly, the NICRA brought an end to the monolithic character of the Unionist Party. As the Civil Rights Campaign gained momentum, the Unionist Party got split into several directions. This, of course, was a major achievement. Similarly, the NICRA paved the way for the formation of two new political parties in Northern Ireland in 1970. Thus, on 21 April 1970, the Alliance Party was formed and on 21 August 1970 the Social Democratic and Labour Party was founded. The changing political scenario in 1970 brought home the realisation in Northern Ireland, that those who wanted to see the Unionists out of office would have to find a political party to pool their efforts.128

Nevertheless, the very success of the civil rights movement was accompanied by a virtual split in the movement in early 1969, transforming it into a loose alliance, only to be forgotten after the achievement of civil rights.

128. NICRA, n.13, p.28.