



1968: The year the North exploded

Matt Collins

It was a seminal year. One defined by the emergence of popular social struggles for progressive change on an international scale, often involving new forms of activism that shook the foundations of regimes across the globe, which fleetingly hinted at the possibility of revolution and fundamental change for millions of people. From the Black Civil Rights Movement in the US, to the mass movement against the Vietnam War and the student and worker mobilisations that engulfed large parts of Europe, through to the events of October '68 in Prague; when the Stalinist veneer of “actually existing” socialism began to crack, as workers in the Czech Republic rose up to demand democracy and liberation. 1968 was a generational rupture, and a period of great possibility. An era when it became possible to imagine a world beyond both free market “liberal” capitalism

and the one-party states of the officially “communist” Eastern Block.

It was a period when, globally, the pendulum seemed to swing in favour of progress, a time to “demand the impossible” as Che Guevara once urged. In an Irish context, demanding the impossible meant the struggle to overcome sectarian division in the North, and the power of a government that had practiced widespread discrimination and repression throughout its five-decade long history, all the while presiding over a society marked by low living standards and poverty for working class people, both Catholic and Protestant. The civil rights movement that exploded onto the streets of Derry and Belfast in October 1968, represented the Irish expression of the global revolt; a generational wave of civil disobedience and grassroots activism—

encompassing various strands of politics that were temporarily united in opposition to the oppressive and discriminatory practices of the Unionist state. The violence and repression that met the civil rights movement was transformative, serving to lay the basis for a protracted period of violence and conflict.

Interpretations of this period speak directly to the causes of violence in the North, and 50 years on from the emergence of the Civil Rights Movement and the period of violence that raged in its aftermath, we have witnessed a systematic assault on the history of the civil rights campaign, in an effort to denigrate the memory of the movement. Take Nelson McCausland—the former DUP MLA now turned unionist commentator—who recently took to the pages of the *Belfast Telegraph* in order to warn of the ground breaking fact that republicans and communists were involved in establishing and organising the civil rights movement, in what appeared a lazy effort to repeat the myth that the civil rights movement amounted to a republican plot to undermine the Northern Ireland state.¹ This myth, of course, was the official line of the Unionist state in the late 1960s. It was strongly proclaimed by pro-Unionist Party media outlets and it also served as a rallying cry of aggression for opposition forces, led by Ian Paisley, who systematically abused civil rights campaigners throughout 1968-1969. That this myth is easily refuted with basic historical study is seemingly lost upon the Nelson McCauslands of this world. Such a debased analysis continues to get a hearing, however, precisely because the effort to denigrate the civil rights movement is so deeply ingrained in various spheres of society today, particularly throughout academic historiography. It is often categorised by a downplaying of the systemic nature of violence and repression endemic to the Northern state at this time, alongside a focus on the role of civil rights activists in “provoking” violence.²

Among an academic community that was strongly shaped by the violent conflict that raged in the aftermath of the civil rights movement, much debate has ensued over the causes of the “troubles” and historians have been keen to attach culpability to those seen to have caused sectarian violence; toward this end the radical left present an easy target. Throughout much historiography, the narrative goes that the civil rights movement was a well-meaning movement that took

up genuine grievances inside the Northern Ireland state, but was ultimately wrecked by a cabal of radical militants, who, at crucial points, pushed too far ahead in pursuit of unrealistic goals and in doing so provoked sectarian violence.³ This approach involves a certain level of victim blaming, whereby civil rights demonstrators who had significant levels of violence inflicted upon them are essentially held responsible for bringing about conflict. But it also involves a more specific argument, which views the role of radicals within the civil rights movement as one that impeded the possibility of a more gradual reform of the Northern state at the beginning of the troubles.⁴ This article is, in part, an attempt to refute this interpretation of the civil rights movement. In doing so, it explores the way in which the upsurge of 1968 temporarily represented a break with past forms of politics in the North, opening up possibilities for a different course and a different future, but ultimately being repressed and marginalised by the Unionist state, and later by British state forces after military intervention in 1969.

The Orange State

The origins of the Northern troubles were rooted in events during the early 20th Century, which saw the partition of Ireland and the birth of the Northern state. The state that arose after partition represented a major setback for working class forces during the revolutionary period (1916-1923). It was a state established in the image of the Unionist Party and the Orange Order, where the position of the minority Catholic community was always insecure with intermitted strife commonplace from the beginning. The extent to which partition represented the maintenance of a colonial project was illustrated by the military support that the new state could call upon in any hour of need. This included a number of battalions of the British Army, the newly formed RUC, and the formation of the Ulster Special Constabulary, the notorious “B Specials”, an all-Protestant quasi-paramilitary police force that essentially absorbed the membership of the pre-partition loyalist movement of the UVF.⁵ Such forces ensured a bloody beginning, and between 1920 and 1922 large scale pogroms and sectarian violence occurred, predominately directed at the Catholic community, although “rotten prods” i.e. those deemed to be disloyal to the new state such as Protestant socialist activists were also targeted.⁶ The

violence represented the extreme end of repression, but sectarian dominance became enshrined into the state in more permanent ways. 1929 saw the abolition of the proportional representation voting system, ensuring that parliamentary oppositional forces, such as labour and nationalist, were pushed aside in the first past the post system.⁷ Further, election boundaries were designed in a way that ensured the Unionist Party would return solid majorities where the Catholic community made up a majority of the population. The government itself boasted an all-Protestant membership that included a high ratio of members of the Orange Order, and preferential treatment toward Protestants was often encouraged.

Discrimination against the Catholic community happened on a significant level in three key areas: electoral practice, employment and public housing. The city of Derry became the classic example of electoral discrimination, where despite Catholics making up over 60 percent of the population, Unionist politicians dominated the local council due to the gerrymandering of boundaries. Regarding employment practices, a system developed that marginalised the Catholic community and often confined them to unskilled, lower paid jobs.⁸ The divide was even more acute within the higher echelons of the state. For example, at senior civil servant level, only one Catholic reached the rank of Permanent Secretary between 1921-1968, and in the judiciary no Catholics were appointed to the Supreme Court from 1925 to 1949. In terms of housing allocation, discrimination was intrinsically linked to the restricted voting franchise that existed inside the Northern state, where a small number of property owners had more than one vote, and a much larger number of the population, amounting to over a quarter of the parliamentary electorate in 1961, were not able to vote at all, due to the franchise being restricted to owners or tenants of homes, or to the spouses of such owners or tenants.⁹ Thus, for the next number of decades the minority community found itself in a precarious position at the mercy of a Protestant dominated Unionist government. But although Unionist ideology implied that all Protestants had interests in common, living standards for both Catholics and Protestants at the poorer end of the social and economic spectrum were on the whole lower than the British average, and class antagonisms often developed within the state.¹⁰

The roots of the revolt

Political opposition had not fared well inside the Northern state after partition, and the organised left lived a fairly stagnant existence for some decades. The two main traditions of political opposition that existed were the constitutional parliamentarianism of the Irish Nationalist Party, and the Republican tradition of the IRA. Both traditions were almost exclusively based in the nationalist constituency and both essentially espoused a form of anti-partitionism, albeit through very different means. By the 1960s neither could claim much success: with the Nationalist Party confined to the fringes of parliamentary life, often ironically debilitated by its long-standing tactic of parliamentary abstentionism. The IRA, on the other hand, had embarked on its ill fated "border campaign" between 1956-1962, which had failed miserably even by the organisations own terms.¹¹ There was also a 'third tradition'; the labour tradition, which sought to unite Catholic and Protestant workers on a social and economic basis inside the Northern state, largely through the structures of the trade union movement and Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP). During the Irish revolutionary period labourism was largely anti-partition. After partition and running into the 1930s it involved both pro and anti partition currents. But by the 1950s the NILP had become a firmly pro-union party, with the anti-partition sections splitting off into smaller groupings like the Irish Labour Party, or later, the Republican Labour Party. Although the 1950s and 1960s saw a rise in electoral support for the NILP, particularly among Protestant workers reflecting the parties labour unionism, social democratic and left politics had not grown in the North of Ireland in the way that various European countries had experienced. By the late 1960s, then, a political vacuum had emerged and oppositional politics in the North was reaching an impasse, as the traditional methods of politics had failed to achieve significant advances.

Underlying the vacuum were profound social and political changes that swept Northern Ireland in the aftermath of the Second World War. The Northern state presented an image of stability and indeed triumphalism for Unionist bosses, being as it was strongly supported by the largest imperialist Empire in the world. However, under the surface it was a state that was built upon profound contradictions. The Unionist project had emerged as a bourgeoning part of the British Empire,

where pillars of industry including linen, textiles and shipbuilding provided the sustained economic ties that helped define Unionist 'Ulster', and its unique relationship to Britain. The state that emerged after partition reflected this economic relationship, but the irony was that although the Unionist state had seemed powerfully intact since partition, the underlying economic trends were ones that pointed to the historic decline of the traditional base of the state. From 1921-1968 the only real period of economic boom occurred in the context of increased production during the Second World War.¹² It was a brief exception fuelled by the war economy, and the broader picture was one of steady economic decline since partition. By the 1950s the linen industry had virtually collapsed, and shipbuilding entered permanent decline in these years.¹³ Economic regression saw factory closures and higher unemployment, and as permanent decline loomed in the 1960s, the historic position of the Protestant working class looked to be increasingly under threat.

These economic changes demanded a new consensus, precipitating a form of liberalising Unionism heralded by Prime Minister Terence O'Neill, elected in 1963. O'Neill tried to revitalize the Northern economy through a strategy that entailed attracting international investment, and this meant appealing to sections of foreign capital that were outside of the traditional employment patterns of the Northern state. Demand for economic change in the North coincided with the southern state moving away from a protectionist economic structure and opening up to British and foreign capital. Therefore, by the late 1960s the economic and material basis for the historic partition of Ireland was beginning to erode and this was expressed in attempts at new political relations. The meeting between Terence O'Neill and Sean Lemass in 1965 signified the changing economic tides of the two states.¹⁴ External political changes also seemed to shift favourably toward those who would assert grievances against the Unionist government. After thirteen years of uninterrupted Conservative Party rule the election of a British Labour government in 1964, led by Harold Wilson, heralded an administration that was ostensibly more susceptible to efforts articulating the hardships that impeded the Catholic community.¹⁵

The 'post-war consensus' that characterised Britain, therefore, also saw a realignment of consensus

in Ireland. Another major contributing factor to this generational shift was the introduction of the welfare state. Proposed by a British Labour government and reluctantly implemented by the Unionist party, the new welfare state delivered a large expansion of the public sector, including homes and jobs. Particular importance in regard to the emergence of the civil rights movement was the expansion of the education sector, which contributed to a growth of Catholic white-collar workers and a confident middle class capable of raising its voice against the grievances practiced by the Unionist government. Post-war housing schemes saw more public homes being built and these were distributed through local authorities. But this meant that in particular areas where Unionist majorities were marginal, serious discrimination was at times exercised in order to maintain gerrymandered boundaries. In a context where housing was already scarce this became a central focal point for the civil rights movement.¹⁶

Therefore the 1960s brought about a contradictory process, where social and economic changes helped create the conditions that saw a challenge to Unionist rule being mounted. The Catholic community began to sense an opportunity for advancement, while sections of the Protestant community were gripped by a sense of regression, due to the decline of the traditional economy and the emergence of a confident minority community. This contradiction was central to the emergence of the civil rights movement and would continue to define the period that followed.

Early civil rights activity

The emerging confidence of the minority community had been expressed in early efforts at exposing housing inequality in Dungannon. In May 1963 the Homeless Citizens League (HCL) was formed, which was predominately made up of Catholic women who initiated some of the first instances of direct action of the 1960s.¹⁷ The HCL precipitated a wider and more generalised campaign, with the founding of the Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ). Launched in 1964 by two leading figures of the HCL, Patricia and Conn McCluskey, it functioned as a pressure group and focused on gathering the extent of discrimination across the North. Its membership was solidly of the professional Catholic middle class.¹⁸ These efforts were strongly complimented by the Campaign for Democracy in Ulster (CDU), formed in 1965; it was

largely a lobby inside the British Labour Party made up of MPs who were sympathetic to the cause of challenging discrimination.¹⁹

Although these organisations played a crucial role in documenting and publicising Unionist abuses of power, any success they had in doing so was outweighed by frustration at the lack of action to address their complaints. The strategy of both the CSJ and the CDU was essentially one of highlighting and documenting discrimination in order to urge constitutional action. But these efforts were largely in vain. Early efforts at redressing the sectarian imbalance faced considerable obstacles; such as the parliamentary convention at Westminster that ensured issues related to Ireland would not be raised in the house, and a system of legal redress that lacked any real avenue for change and greatly lagged behind the movement that would soon begin to gather on the streets.²⁰

It was against these obstacles that the best known of all civil rights organisations was born, the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA). The idea of setting up a broad civil rights body was first raised at a conference of the Wolfe Tone societies over 13-14 August 1966. However, the aims and objectives of the organisation were far from what would have been considered traditionally 'republican', saying nothing about the British presence in Ireland nor even the concrete grievances of the minority community, and instead focusing on issues of civil liberties such as freedom of speech and assembly.²¹ NICRA itself was formally launched in 1967 and its broad basis appealed to a coalition of forces, including nationalists, sections of the Catholic middle class, republicans who had moved away from the tactic of armed struggle and elements of the organised left and labour movement. It also had some tentative support and involvement from liberal Unionists.²² In its early formation NICRA's agenda was largely based around defending citizens' rights through documenting legal abuses. The organisations' own history would later note how "For the first 18 months of its existence NICRA was nothing more than a pressure group... it rarely went beyond the stage of dignified written protest."²³ This cautious approach would be superseded as small public protests began to find a much wider resonance. Therefore, while the early campaign for civil rights had hitherto been conducted through respectable and acceptable means, the potential for a

new kind of movement soon emerged out of changing local conditions and the powerful influence that the global revolts of the late 1960s had on Northern Ireland.

October 1968

By the summer of 1968 the NICRA strategy of lobbying was becoming exhausted, and sections of the association were realising the necessity of direct action. Behind the scenes of official politics a myriad of different individuals were engaged in action around housing agitation, particularly in Derry, where for some months a loose network of socialists had been agitating with some success around the issue of housing and unemployment. Members of the Derry Labour Party, republicans and independent activists were leading local activity and in June 1968 they took action to highlight the case of one family who were forced to live in a dilapidated caravan, by dragging the caravan onto a main road through the Bogside area. The protest attracted widespread support and the family were re-housed.²⁴ That same month, MP Austin Currie raised a specific case of discrimination in housing in the area of Caledon, a small village in Tyrone, where a nineteen-year-old unmarried Protestant woman and secretary of a Unionist parliamentary candidate, had been allocated a home despite a number of more qualified Catholic families in need. Currie joined a group of local republican activists and squatted in the home in an effort to highlight the issue. The action sparked a formidable interest.²⁵

The protest in Caledon led Currie and others to propose a public civil rights march and although it was met with caution by some on the NICRA leadership, the proposal won support and the NICRA executive called Northern Ireland's first 'civil rights' march from Dungannon to Coalisland on 24 August. The demonstration attracted a broad base of support, primarily from the nationalist community, and mobilised over 2,000 people.²⁶ Evidently, the march would not reach its destination and was blocked from entering the town centre of Dungannon by the RUC, in the face of a Paisleyite protest. Scuffles broke out and, eventually, after appeals from NICRA leaders the march was wound down, but not before the crowd began to sing "We Shall Overcome"²⁷. The international anthem for civil rights had made its way to the streets of Northern Ireland.

Events in Dungannon provided the opportunity for

the Derry radicals to call a civil rights march in their city on 5th October, much to the consternation of the Nationalist Party.²⁸ The march was to pass through the main “Unionist” area in the city, and was banned by Minister of Home Affairs, William Craig. After haphazard negotiations, the Derry radicals managed to get the support of NICRA. With socialists at the helm of affairs the 5 October march took on a distinctly class character that forwarded labour slogans. The placards distributed by Derry activists read, ‘Tories are Vermin’.²⁹ A busload of the newly launched Young Socialist Alliance (YSA) from Queen’s University joined the Derry march. The YSA was essentially an independent version of the Labour Party Young Socialists, established by Michael Farrell in order to coalesce socialist activism at Queen’s and he took its name directly from its US counterpart.³⁰ The Young Socialists had been sporadically active in Belfast throughout the year, for example, in organising solidarity around international issues such as the Vietnam War and against the Russian invasion of Czechoslovakia. They arrived to Derry and joined the demonstration concurrent to a tense stand off occurring between the organisers and the police at Duke Street. While the civil rights activists held a public meeting, some of the more moderate leaders of NICRA, particularly Betty Sinclair, began to call on people to disperse. Michael Farrell describes what happened next:

We were not having that. It was 1968, the year of student revolutions in Paris and Prague, of Mexico City and the Chicago Democratic convention. We did not think of ourselves in quite that league but going home peacefully meant letting Bill Craig and the RUC walk all over us... Suddenly an RUC man rammed a baton into the belly of the man beside me. I did not even see the baton that hit me on the head and the next few minutes were hazy. I only know that in the TV film of the events I can be seen on the ground being belaboured by an RUC officer with a blackthorn stick. After that it was chaos.³¹

The RUC baton charged the crowd, which included three British Labour Party MPs, in a frenzied attack to break up the march. The events of 5 October 1968 in Derry marked a turning point, as the bloody scenes were broadcast on television sets across the country. That evening the first major rioting began across the city and barricades began to appear in Catholic areas. A mass movement was emerging.

The presence of Queen’s students on the Derry demonstration was no aberration. Across Europe in the 1960s student radicalism emerged in an explosive way that was rooted in changes in the university system, namely, the rapid expansion of higher education in the post-war period and the increase of access to university to those from working class backgrounds. In Belfast, this had the added impact of expanding access to university to the Catholic community. Although once primarily the preserve of Protestant elites, by the late 1960s Queen’s University was opened up to a hopeful generation of young Catholics who later ensured that demands for further empowerment gained traction. Significantly, these same developments would also produce a layer of young Protestants who, for a brief period, identified more strongly with the cause for civil rights and the ‘global student rebellion’ than with the conservative Unionist state.

It was in this context that the Belfast students returned to their campus to launch further protests. A student Joint Action Committee that had protested the banning of republican clubs the previous year was resurrected and called a march from the University to City Hall. So it was that on 9 October over 2,000 students took to the streets, their march immediately opposed by loyalist forces led by Ian Paisley. The students were blocked by the RUC in Linenhall Street, where they took part in a mass sit down protest. In the aftermath of the demonstration, at a mass meeting in the University “The People’s Democracy” (PD) was born. The PD was perhaps the best expression of the global revolt in Ireland. It reflected the autonomous student formations that were emerging across Europe at the time; instead of a formal leadership, the group elected a ‘faceless committee’ of 10 activists. The PD showed a distain for traditional forms of politics and a distrust of bureaucratic structure and organisation.³² In its early formation it was influenced by the “spontaneity of resistance”, best expressed by the most known leader of the French student revolt, Daniel Cohn-Bendit.³³ The new student revolts of the late 1960s rose rapidly and moved fast, often counterpoising this militant “vanguard” with the old left’s models of patiently building a Party with a structure and leadership.³⁴ This would prove problematic later, when questions of organisation and strategy confronted the civil rights movement. In the weeks that followed student

demonstrators would launch significant mobilisations in Belfast under the banner of The PD, to be met consistently by oppositional loyalists. This coincided with the rapid spreading of civil rights activism across the North; for example, thousands marched in Derry on 2 November.

The North at the Crossroads?

With the glare of the world's media firmly fixed on Northern Ireland, increasing pressure was brought to bear on the Unionist government to enact reform. O'Neill's position had become untenable: caught between an intensified street agitation demanding civil rights and a loyalist backlash that sought to thwart it. Inaction was no longer an option. On 22 November the Unionist government announced a five-point programme for reform, which included, a points system for public housing allocation, a complaints ombudsman to be modelled on the British system, and a development commission to implement the Londonderry Area Plan and the abolition of the company vote.³⁵ In a matter of weeks the civil rights movement had secured a better political advancement for the minority community than decades of political stalemate. But although it was a significant climb-down by O'Neill, the package fell short of the programme of reform envisaged by the civil rights movement; in particular, the fundamental grievance of 'one man one vote' would not be addressed, as the manipulated electoral boundaries remained intact. Furthermore, the notorious Special Powers Act was to remain. O'Neill's reforms essentially had the impact of enraging the loyalist right, which reacted bitterly against any form of concession, while failing to satisfy the civil rights movement, of whom all major currents denounced the package as insufficient.³⁶

After the reform package was announced loyalist opposition intensified. In Dungannon on 23 November, civil rights demonstrators were attacked by a mob of loyalists who were led by members of the B Specials.³⁷ The following week, a major NICRA demonstration was called in Armagh to reassert the fundamental civil rights demands. Up to 5,000 protestors gathered to march, their path blocked by hundreds of Paisley supporters who had descended on the town earlier that morning. Paisley's loyalists effectively took over the town ahead of the civil rights march; shops and businesses were forced to close as the loyalist crowd assembled, armed with

cudgels and wooden planks, and civil rights supporters noted how the RUC openly fraternised with the loyalists.³⁸ The march was prevented from reaching the town centre, ultimately, the day had been one in which a legal march had been blocked by an armed loyalist force, which the police had been, at best, incapable of challenging. In articulating a traditional Unionist response to the civil rights movement, militant loyalists had begun to win the support of members of the police force; it was this type of scenario that continually confronted the movement and laid the basis for a protracted period of civil unrest.

Hard-line opposition to the civil rights demands strengthened and the Unionist Party itself was bitterly divided over the reforms. William Craig led the charge, and in the aftermath of the November announcement made sweeping sectarian speeches, attacking the Catholic Church and blaming the civil rights demonstrators for the violence in Armagh.³⁹ Thus, when O'Neill appeared on television on 9 December to give the defining speech of his political career, it was amidst circumstances of intense polarisation; with right-wing Unionists infuriated at the prospect of reform and civil rights activists increasingly alienated from his premiership. However, the violence that categorised the previous few weeks also created the context in which calls to reassert order found a hearing. In declaring, 'Ulster at the Crossroads', O'Neill appealed for calm toward the civil rights demonstrators, arguing for a cessation of activity and an acceptance of a timeframe to implement the November reforms. Hitting out at a 'minority of agitators determined to subvert lawful authority' within the civil rights movement, he also called out the "bullyboy tactics" of Paisley.⁴⁰ The speech brought events to a head inside the Unionist Party, and by 11 December William Craig was forced to resign his position of Minister of Home Affairs.

O'Neill's call for calm had a resonance. It matched the mood of many of the moderates inside the civil rights movement, some of who had been cautious of action from the very beginning; both NICRA and the Derry Citizens Action Committee declared a suspension of civil rights mobilisation.⁴¹ In early December the PD had met at Queen's, and after a long and contentious meeting it was agreed to call off a demonstration in Belfast and a "Long March" that had been planned for Derry, on 21 December.⁴² For the socialist left of the

PD, the call to cease mobilisation was a capitulation to the Unionist Party, who had given no commitment to fundamental reform. In effect, the civil rights movement was being asked to help stabilise the Unionist state by putting their faith in O'Neill. Michael Farrell and other members of the YSA, who had already stated their intention to carry on with marching, called another PD meeting on campus on 20 December, which agreed for a march immediately in the New Year. The whole affair reflected the nature of the PD; it was a movement with no real fixed programme or objectives, in which any decision could easily be overturned in the next meeting and the most militant 'leaders' could set the agenda.

The decision to march on 1 January has been presented by historians as one that had the support of a tiny minority of students, who were warned against marching by the great and the good of the civil rights movement. For example, Henry Patterson has stated that the PD march was, 'Criticised by the mainstream leaders of the civil rights movement and with the support of only a few dozen students...'⁴³ It is a frequent misrepresentation.⁴⁴ The only public caution came from Eddie McAteer, who had a track record of opposing civil rights mobilization.⁴⁵ Certainly, there was private disagreement within NICRA and other civil rights bodies, with Betty Sinclair and John Hume undoubtedly among the most wary of marching. Yet much of the criticism of the march was only revealed in hindsight. At the time there was significant support. NICRA and the DCAC had committed to a month's long truce, until 11 January, and therefore, physically joining the march was ruled out, but they did support the students in other ways. NICRA financially contributed to fund supplies for the march, and its general secretary, John McAnerney, publicly supported the PD, stating, '...we are wholeheartedly behind the People's Democracy in this.'⁴⁶ The DCAC, under the leadership of John Hume, announced that it would meet the marchers when they arrived in Derry, and the Dungannon Civil Rights Committee urged its supporters to take part in the PD march. Both the Falls Divisional Labour Party branch in Belfast, and the Derry Labour Party voiced support for the students.⁴⁷ NILP Chairman Paddy Devlin, too, supported the march and organised food for the marchers along their journey.⁴⁸ Thus although a small crowd embarked on the march, they could claim wider support.

On the eve of the march the PD released a statement, it conveys a message that is as relevant to contemporary interpretations of the march as to whom it was originally addressed. Its opening lines read, "To those of you who talk of provocation we can only say that a non-sectarian protest against injustice can offend only those who uphold injustices... It is, perhaps, as well to repeat that we are demanding not privileges but rights and that in marching to Derry we are merely exercising another fundamental democratic liberty."⁴⁹ The march was modelled on the Selma to Montgomery march, led by Dr Martin Luther King, in Alabama in 1965. A pivotal moment in the US civil rights struggle had inspired what would become the most eventful march in the Northern Ireland civil rights movement.

Burntollet and its aftermath

The events that confronted civil rights marchers from 1-4 January 1969 have been well documented. PD marchers faced obstruction, intimidation, harassment and violence throughout the course of the next four days, which exposed the deep backlash that was developing against the civil rights movement. The major source of violence came from supporters of Ian Paisley and his right hand man, Major Ronald Bunting, who declared their intent to 'harry and harass' the students along the way. The march faced a number of blockades by loyalists armed with weaponry and cudgels, most notably at Antrim Town, Randalstown and Maghera. The violence reached a crescendo, however, at Burntollet Bridge outside Derry, where a large crowd of loyalists, made up of many off duty B Specials, descended onto the march and violently beat the civil rights activists. When the march re-gathered after running the gauntlet of violence at Burntollet, it was again attacked on the outskirts of Derry by a crowd brandishing bricks, bottles and petrol bombs, which reigned down at the marchers before another violent attack on the demonstration.⁵⁰ The PD march began with some 40 students in Belfast. By the time it reached Derry hundreds swelled its ranks and thousands gathered to greet the civil rights activists at a rally. That evening the B Specials brutally attacked the Bogside in a clear act of reprisal. Barricades were erected to defend against the police, and residents began measures to take control over the area. A makeshift piece of graffiti was daubed on a gable wall entering the Bogside, 'You Are

Now Entering Free Derry'; it was a slogan inspired by the campus revolt in Berkeley College during the US civil rights movement.⁵¹ Free Derry was born.

In the immediate aftermath of Burntollet a backlash developed against the radical left, which ignored the glaring way in which state forces were involved in the attack and instead blamed the PD for bringing about violence. Terence O'Neill released a wholly one-sided statement that denounced the "arrogance" of "foolhardy and irresponsible students"⁵². O'Neill's statement cast him further out of touch with those sympathetic to the civil rights cause, who had witnessed a peaceful demonstration brutally beaten, seemingly with the support of elements of the state. Later, the *Cameron Report* (1969), the British government's official investigation of events, laid down the conventional interpretation of the march regarding the PD, stating that elements in the PD had explicitly "sought" violence and that "their object was to increase tension"⁵³. The findings of the *Cameron Report* are of significance because of the way they have set the acceptable terms of academic interpretation of Burntollet, and the role of the radical left during the civil rights movement. The report presents the civil rights movement as a genuine movement for reform that was wrecked by a cabal of radical militants, who set out to provoke violence in pursuit of a radical agenda. Particular fire is directed at the PD and the Derry Left. By contrast, Cameron goes on to essentially exonerate the RUC as an institution during the same events.⁵⁴

It is highly problematic that this perspective has been accepted so uncritically throughout historiography, particularly in regards to the Burntollet march, since any feasible reconstruction of events regarding Burntollet shows that PD marchers went to great lengths to maintain non-violence and press for the reform programme laid out by the wider civil rights movement. Further, an examination of the evidence indicates that the RUC led civil rights activists into the ambush, which was, at the very least, acquiesced in by important figures in the Unionist Party. This was always the claim of civil rights activists after the attack, yet historians have not investigated such claims with any rigor and Cameron rejected them as 'wholly unjustified... baseless and indeed ridiculous.'⁵⁵ After the attack the RUC officers charged with policing the march themselves went out of their way to misrepresent what happened at Burntollet.

The official police report of the ambush was penned by District Inspector Harrison, on 6 January, after news of the attack at Burntollet Bridge had exploded throughout the media. Harrison explained that no arrests were made because 'the police were fully engaged with getting the marchers through and crushing the attack', he also claimed that, 'the loyalists were attacked and baton charged by the police.'⁵⁶ The credibility of the RUC reports are highly questionable, as no other source testifies to a police baton charge against the loyalist attackers, or anything that resembled a 'crushing' of the attack. The overwhelming evidence testifies that the violence at Burntollet was directed at PD marchers with no resistance from the RUC; some activists even claimed that the RUC joined in at certain moments.⁵⁷ Testimonies from the *Cameron Report* itself indicate that the RUC were aware of the location of the attack. In one revealing interview, Cameron states that undercover police infiltrated a meeting of Paisley and his supporters in Derry's Guildhall on 3 January, where the final details of the attacks were arranged:

We know that there was at least one Special Branch officer, if not a number of others, in the audience that night taking a note of what was being said and the position then was that they regarded the situation as being so serious that they carried out a reconnaissance in the vicinity of Burntollet Bridge. The obvious idea of which was to spot any snipers that there might be in the area on the day in question. Obviously they were afraid or must have been afraid that people would not only concentrate there with something like scatter guns but that there would be something there which would be much more lethal. At this time there was information available to the RUC of possibly very serious consequences.⁵⁸

Other testimonies show that Unionist politicians who joined loyalist opposition along the route knew of the location of the attack, and also the attackers. Both Robin Chichester Clark, MP for Londonderry, and William Anderson, former Mayor and then MP for the City of Londonderry, were open about their opposition to the march. The testimony given by both men to the Commission reveals much about their knowledge of the attack, Anderson admitted that 'I had heard there was likely to be trouble for the march and I and Chichester-Clark went out to Burntollet, where we heard there was going to be some trouble.'⁵⁹ More revealing were

Chichester Clark's comments, who knew of 'more extreme Protestant groups' in the community who had began counter activity, adding 'I have no intention of naming them...'⁶⁰

One does not need to engage in speculation surrounding these comments to draw two conclusions; firstly, that high-ranking Unionist politicians were aware of an attack and its location, but also, that they were privy to the identities of those who carried out the attack. Taken alongside the evidence already presented that suggests the police knew about the planned attack, it seems feasible to conclude that the ambush happened with the knowledge of key elements of the security forces and the government. Such evidence is rarely considered among historians who focus on the "provocative" actions of civil rights activists. Indeed, the actions of PD marchers, which were consistently non-violent throughout the course of the four days, stand in contrast to both loyalist counter demonstrators and state forces. The "Long March" to Derry was by definition a conscious attempt to challenge sectarian division through the power of Catholic and Protestant self-activity, and the new left were among the most anti-sectarian and non-violent forces of the period.

1969 the fateful year

Burntollet was indicative of the wider experience throughout 1968-1969; a non-violent movement violently attacked and subsequent repression unleashed against significant sections of the Catholic community. The violence and repression, however, did not simply come from the fringes of the hard-line Loyalist right, but from the state apparatus. This process increasingly alienated the Catholic community from the state, and as the North teetered from civil rights to civil strife, the upsurge against the Unionist state continued. February 1969 saw an election in which the minority community further asserted its demand for rights through the ballot box; the Nationalist Party lost significant ground to a number of newly elected MPs who had took part in the civil rights campaign.⁶¹ The PD stood in 8 constituencies taking 23,645 votes. One student, Fergus Woods, came 220 votes from being elected an MP to the Stormont parliament. The electoral highpoint came later in April 1969, when Bernadette Devlin was returned to the Westminster parliament as MP for Mid Ulster, with over 33,000 votes. Devlin's election summed up the

contradiction that the left faced, in that small groups of socialists had gathered significant support, but lacked the political and organisational coherency to offer a way forward during the crisis of 1969. Thus, after sectarian repression reached a crescendo that summer, the left found themselves on the margins and overcome by events.

The loyalist backlash against reform intensified throughout 1969. UVF bombs forced O'Neill out of office in April, and civil rights demonstrations increasingly ended in violent scenes. The major turning point, however, came with the yearly loyalist marching season in August 69 – an annual display of Orange triumphalism, but one that took on added significance in the aftermath of 1968. In Derry, after small scale riots broke out between youths and the RUC, an uprising broke out – the 'battle of the Bogside'. Revolt spread across the North after civil rights activists demonstrated in order to take police pressure off Derry. Violence was widespread and Belfast experienced unprecedented repression after Catholic crowds marched on police stations during 13 and 14 August. Members of the RUC and the B Specials were at the forefront of attacking Catholic residents alongside loyalists, during scenes that included the deployment of armoured vehicles, which traversed West Belfast unleashing heavy machine gun fire.⁶² By 15 August hundreds of Catholic homes had been burnt to the ground. The worst disturbances were in the west of the city, where Bombay Street was set ablaze, as well as the Catholic enclave of Ardoyne in North Belfast. In Belfast alone six people were killed, including a nine-year-old Catholic boy, Patrick Rooney. The Scarman Report, set up to investigate the disturbances in the summer of 1969, estimated that 1,820 families fled their households between July, August and September; 1,505 of these households were Catholics, which made up 82.7 percent, or 5.3 percent of all Catholic families in the city.⁶³ The crisis precipitated British military intervention, whose primary aim was to strengthen Unionist rule.

Amidst the repression barricades went up in Belfast and Derry, and autonomous zones where the RUC could not enter were established. "Free Derry" was the height of the resistance, where MP Bernadette Devlin led the defence of the area, and state forces were effectively driven out of the Bogside until October 1969. "Free Belfast", too, lasted some weeks as a large part

of Catholic West Belfast became a “no go” area where British troops and RUC forces could not enter. Socialists played a crucial role in these uprisings, through Citizens Defence Committees, which sprang up to organise much of the resistance in Belfast and Derry. Yet, much like its involvement in the wider civil rights movement, the left was largely submerged into these and lacked an organised force. In Belfast, for example, PD student activists were active behind the barricades, producing newspapers and running pirate radio stations to pump out propaganda against the RUC and British troops.

Eamonn McCann later took stock of the period, noting the powerful obstacles that faced the upsurge in 1968-1969; the deep rootedness of sectarianism and the power of the state, the tight grip of communal politics, and the inability of the wider left and trade union movement to stand effectively against the repression, all resulted in difficult terrain for the left. McCann noted: “The realistic possibility we did have, and didn’t take, was of recruiting relatively rapidly from the masses of angry, urgent working class youth whom we had helped bring onto the streets, and perhaps entering 1969 with a revolutionary socialist organisation a few hundred strong.”⁶⁴

The left and the struggle in the North

Part of the problem was the political incoherence on the left. During the heady days of 1968, almost the entire left had been united in assuming that partition was irrelevant to the struggle for civil rights. When the PD emerged, for example, it had explicitly stated, “we regard the border as irrelevant in our struggle for civil rights.”⁶⁵ It signified a generation that viewed with disdain the way in which conservative politicians and clerics had clung to the national question with such tenacity, on both sides of the border. Others on the left viewed the question of partition as one that ought to be parked until a later date, after democratic reforms had been realised. The obvious problem, however, was that reform had been consistently blocked by the Orange machine, which relied on sectarianism for its survival, and purported a wholly exaggerated view of the threat the civil rights demands posed. Overcoming sectarianism, then, inevitably meant overcoming the power of the state. Elements of the left did understand this. Michael Farrell laid out his view in 1969:

The border must go, but it must go in the direction of

a socialist republic and not just into a republic which might at some future date become socialist. Firstly the border must go because it is a relic of imperialism, and in order to root out imperialism we have to root out the neo-imperialist set-up in the South and the neo-colonial one in the North. Secondly, Northern Ireland is completely unviable economically and only exists as a capitalist entity at the moment because of massive subventions from Britain. Similarly the South on its own is an area of small farms with very little industry. It too is completely unviable on its own and as a result is also dependent on Britain. The unification of Ireland into a socialist republic is not only necessary for the creation of a viable economy, it must also be an immediate demand, because only the concept of a socialist republic can ever reconcile Protestant workers, who rightly have a very deep-seated fear of a Roman Catholic republic, to the ending of the border.⁶⁶

The loose group of radicals around Farrell was too small and flimsily organised to put such a perspective into practice. What of the bigger battalions on the left? The Communist Party of Northern Ireland was involved in NICRA since its inception. Its role, however, had been one that largely warned against a strategy of political action, such as marching and street mobilisation, in favour of a more gradual campaign to reform the state. CPNI leading figure Betty Sinclair, for example, was one of the most vocal moderate voices on the NICRA executive, both in arguing against mobilisation and in championing the reforming capacity of O’Neill’s administration, against those who sought to directly confront the government.⁶⁷

The socialism of the CPNI looked to the Soviet block as a form of ‘actually existing’ socialism. In Ireland, this informed a strategy that saw the potential for socialist politics emerging through the structures of the state. Democratising the Northern state was seen as the first “stage” in this process. The CPNI saw NICRA ‘as the first step towards a broad electoral alliance for replacing the Unionist regime with a ‘progressive’ government at Stormont.’⁶⁸ This meant, in practice, an acceptance of the constitutional position of the Northern state and a postponement of raising questions such as partition or workers’ control until a later date, presumably until after Northern Ireland had experienced a stage of democratisation. Throughout the 1968-1969 period

the Communists clung rigidly to this perspective. The major problem facing proponents of the “stages theory” by 1969 was that events indicated how their first stage—a process of democratic reform within the structures of partition—had been wholly unachievable. As Mike Milotte argues, the CPNI were able to punch above their weight in the early days of the civil rights campaign: “Their ability to influence events waned, however, when the masses took to the streets in ever-increasing numbers and evaporated entirely when the guns came out”⁶⁹.

A similar but more acute process of *supporting the institutions of the state* increasingly cast the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP) as irrelevant among the Catholic masses. The NILP reached its heyday in the mid 1960s, and entered 1968 with a substantial electoral base, albeit primarily in Protestant areas. The Party essentially advocated a parliamentary solution to the issue of discrimination, arguing that a return of a Labour majority in elections would best secure the civil rights demands.⁷⁰ Thus, while NILP members played a role in the early civil rights campaign on an individual basis, the organisation was wedded to supporting partition and sought to use the state structures as an arena to transform society. As the state stepped in to repress the civil rights campaign the party found itself essentially falling behind state repression. For example, the NILP joined the Unionist cabinet in 1971, the same year in which internment without trial was introduced. By the time non-violent anti-internment marchers were gunned down by the British Army on the streets of Derry on Bloody Sunday in January 1972, NILP MP Vivian Simpson endorsed much of what the government was saying about the atrocity from the floor of the Stormont parliament, while failing to offer any words of condemnation toward the military.⁷¹ It illustrated how disconnected the NILP were from the growing movement against internment and to ‘Smash Stormont’.

Perhaps the main current with the potential to transform the situation in the North was the trade union movement. Elements of the labour movement had been involved in pushing class politics to the forefront of civil rights agitation, but they had done so in a largely formal and tokenistic way during the early period of NICRA, when letter writing and lobbying was the order of the day, as opposed to active street mobilisation. More generally,

the history of the trade union movement during the civil rights campaign and the outbreak of the troubles is a history of failure in challenging the sectarian practices of the Northern state. Recognising this does not dismiss the positive record of many trade unionists in the North. Many activists did of course make valiant efforts to stop the slide into sectarian violence. But too many key figures in the trade union movement stayed quiet in the face of growing loyalist reaction and state repression. Some were worse: actively supporting pogroms against Catholics. Too often individuals with deeply bigoted views were allowed to hold office unchallenged. For too long state repression was unacknowledged and the absence of the official trade union movement, even in the early stages of street agitation during the civil rights movement, is glaring.

The most important trade union intervention into the early troubles came in August 1969, when in the wake of Bombay Street being burnt to the ground, shop stewards in east Belfast agitated against the threat of serious attacks on Catholic workers in the Shipyards, and possibly prevented a repeat of the pogroms of the 1920s. But these efforts were never generalised across the union movement, and the response from ICTU was essentially to argue for a restoration of “law and order” (while barricades went up to defend against state repression), ignoring the fact that it was the very forces of law and order, such as the RUC and the B Specials, who were the central force of violence at this time.⁷² This would be the picture as things continued into the 1970s, and as British troops showed their ability to repress the Catholic community more effectively than the B Specials or RUC ever had, support for the forces of “law and order” took on a more reactionary hue. The whole sorry period was well summed up in the fate of the often lauded NILP activist Sandy Scott, who led opposition to violence in 1969 only to end up taking part in trade union delegations to the Unionist government that called for tougher security measures in the run up to internment, alongside future leaders of the UDA. In one such delegation, in June 1970, the trade unionists told the government “It was possible that some Roman Catholic workers might be gently requested to leave for their own good”, before going on to warn:

It was also possible that there might well be cases of intimidation and it was hoped that they would be permitted to deal with them. It was also hoped

that the management would be understanding in its attitude to small groups of men who might gather in the yard.⁷³

Unionist Minister for Commerce, Robin Bailie, ended this particular meeting by giving a commitment that he would speak to management about the latter point. The inability of the trade union movement to challenge loyalist ideas inside the working class movement directly facilitated the rise of the loyalist backlash against reform, which, for example, mobilised significant layers in Protestant workers demanding the introduction of internment in 1971 and later culminated in the Ulster Workers Council Strike in 1974, a reactionary attempt to restore Orange rule in the North.⁷⁴ None of this should denigrate the remarkable role played by individual trade unionists, or the best elements of class solidarity in the history of the labour movement: there is a rich tradition of unity too. But there was a rotten history of acquiescence in the face of sectarianism as well, not always as extreme as that of the beginning of the troubles, but usually with the same features: a refusal to condemn state repression, an unwillingness to challenge sectarianism within the movement, and the advocacy of support for the institutions of the state above all else.

The re-forging of Connollyism

British military intervention after 1969 crystallised the question of partition in the North. It was an intervention dictated by well-worn and often brutal colonial strategies: internment without trial, shoot to kill, and “counter insurgency” operations, such as the use of loyalist paramilitaries as allies, to name a few.⁷⁵ The level of state violence in this period was the major contributor to filling the ranks of those forces who had an immediate answer to overcoming the state, through the tactic of armed struggle, namely, the Provisional IRA. The state’s reaction to reform created far bigger grievances than of those originally highlighted by the civil rights movement, and this in turn called into the question the reformability and legitimacy of the state.⁷⁶ But it must also be remembered that any significant gains made during the civil rights era came about primarily through mass popular struggle from below, not as a result of armed actions carried out by the few. The development of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, for example, established after the Housing

Executive Act (1971), was a clear concession won by the civil rights campaign. Yet the overriding lesson of the civil rights campaign was that the primary force of violence and division was the existence of the Northern state itself.

50 years on from the civil rights movement and the history of 1968 points to an upsurge that contradicts the conventional view of oppositional politics in the North, which is often presented as a straightforward choice between the politics of armed struggle or constitutional nationalism. The political convulsions of the late 1960s gave a glimpse of a time when, briefly at least, people power emerged in a way that heralded the possibility of a different form of politics, one based upon internationalism and the struggle for working class self emancipation. The challenge of 1968 in Ireland was, in essence, the challenge to re-forge the politics of James Connolly; categorised broadly by anti-imperialism and anti-partitionism, a rejection of the pan-class nature of the Unionist and Nationalist projects, and the advocacy of a 32-county socialism based upon revolutionary class politics, and Protestant and Catholic workers’ unity. Today, faced with a sectarian state that continues to deny rights and fails to deliver for working class people, the task of re-forging the politics of Connolly remains.

Notes

1 “Why unionists must ensure that the true origins of the civil rights movement are not forgotten” - available online, <https://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/columnists/nelson-mccausland/why-unionists-must-ensure-that-the-true-origins-of-the-civil-rights-movement-are-not-forgotten-36456850.html>

2 Dan Finn provides an excellent critique of this tendency in, ‘The Point of No return? The People’s Democracy and the Burntoll march’, *Field Day Review* (Dublin, Field Day Publications, 2013).

3 See, Henry Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939: the persistence of conflict* (Dublin, Penguin Ireland, 2006), p. 209. Also see, Simon Prince, *Northern Ireland’s ’68: Civil Rights, Global Revolt and the Origins of the Troubles* (Dublin, Irish

Academic Press, 2007).

4 Finn, 'The Point of No return?' p. 7.

5 Jonathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, p. 475.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 494.

7 John Whyte, 'How much discrimination was there under the unionist regime, 1921-1968?' *Contemporary Irish Studies*, ed. Tom Gallagher and James O'Connell (Manchester University Press, 1983), available online, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/discrimination/whyte.htm#chap1>

8 *Ibid.*

9 *Ibid.*

10 As Seán Mitchell points out in an important history of class struggle in the 1930s: 'In the 1930s Northern Ireland was the poorest region of the United Kingdom: by every standard of measurement living standards in Northern Ireland were far below the British average, and by the end of the 1930s average income per head in the North was just £64.7 compared with the UK average of £111.' Seán Mitchell, *Struggle or Starve: working class unity in Belfast's 1932 outdoor relief riots* (Chicago, Haymarket Books, 2017), p. 40.

11 The IRA's own public statement drafted to announce the end of the campaign stated that, 'The decision to end the Resistance campaign has been taken in view of the general situation. Foremost among the factors motivating this course of action has been the attitude of the general public whose minds have been deliberately distracted from the supreme issue facing the Irish people- the unity and freedom of Ireland.' Bowyer Bell, *The Secret Army*, p. 334.

12 Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, p. 516.

13 *Ibid.*, pp. 627-628.

14 Allen, 1916, pp. 136-138.

15 McGarry and O'Leary, *Explaining Northern Ireland*, p. 257.

16 As John Whyte explained, 'Housing policy in individual areas, such as Fermanagh or Dungannon, could be very unfair. The civil rights agitation of 1968 was sparked off by the allocation of a house at Caledon, in Dungannon Rural District, to an unmarried Protestant girl who, as the Cameron report said (1969: para. 28), could 'by no stretch of the imagination . . . be regarded as a priority tenant' when there were Catholic families in the area badly in need of housing.' Whyte, 'How much discrimination was there under the unionist regime?'

17 Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, pp. 82-88.

18 *Ibid.*, p. 94. For an example of their publications, see, *Northern Ireland: The Plain Truth*, Issued by the Campaign for Social Justice in Northern Ireland (Dungannon, 1969)

19 Geoffrey Bell, *Troublesome Business: The Labour Party and the Irish Question* (London, Pluto Press, 1982), p. 104.

20 Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, pp. 118-120.

21 The key demands were: 'To defend the basic freedoms of citizens. 2. To protect the rights of the individual. 3. To highlight all possible abuses of power. 4. To demand

guarantees for freedom of speech, assembly and association.

5. To inform the public of their lawful rights.' *Ibid.*, p. 133.

22 Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*, p. 264.

23 NICRA, "We Shall Overcome..." available online, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/nicra/nicra78.htm>, accessed on 08/08/2015

24 McCann, *War in an Irish Town*, available online, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/mccann93.htm>

25 Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, p. 135. Austin Currie, *All Hell Will Break Loose*, (Dublin, O'Brien Press, 2004), pp. 96-98.

26 Bardon, *A History of Ulster*, p. 652.

27 NICRA, 'We Shall Overcome', available online, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/events/crights/nicra/nicra782.htm>

28 For an account of the march from its principal organizer see, McCann, *War and an Irish Town*, pp. 39-41.

29 Eamonn McCann, 'The National Health Service and the struggle for civil rights', *War and Peace in Northern Ireland* (Dublin, Hot Press Books, 1998), p. 27.

30 The YSA was launched informally at Queen's in June 1968 and contained many members of the Labour Party Young Socialists', including those who on the Derry march. Its first chairperson was Michael Farrell and it publicly announced its presence on 5 October, see the *Irish News* on 5 October 1968 for their press release.

31 Farrell, 'Long March to Freedom', *Twenty Years On*, p. 55.

32 Cameron Report, para 195. Arthur, *The People's Democracy*.

33 Daniel Cohn-Bendit, known as 'Danny the Red', was the most notorious leader of the student uprising in Paris and was a central figure of the French left for some period. Today he is a Green MEP.

34 Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, *Obsolete Communism: The Leftwing Alternative*, (New York, McGraw-Hill book company, 1968), p58-63.

35 Prince, *Northern Ireland's '68*, p. 185.

36 Farrell, *The Orange State*, p 248.

37 *Irish News*, 25 November 1968. The Cameron Report (1969).

38 One civil rights activist who ventured amongst the loyalists recorded the scene in which police officers chatted amicably with loyalists 'who carried broken off planks and vicious six inch nails protruding from their ends, with young girls and boys of 15 who had metal bars and lead piping and with men who sported bill-hooks, axe handles and table legs.' Detonator newsheet, No. 3, PRONI, D3219/3/28. Also see, *Sunday News*, 1 December 1968.

39 *Irish News*, 3 December 1968.

40 Ulster is at the crossroads-Television broadcast by Terence O'Neill, PRONI, CAB/9/B/205/8.

41 NICRA, 'We Shall Overcome'.

42 Evidence submitted by Michael Farrell to the Cameron

Commission, PRONI, GOV/2/1/218.

43 Patterson, *Ireland Since 1939*, p. 209.

44 For example, Bew and Gillespie virtually repeat this line, stating that ‘There was little support for the march from the outset— only a few dozen left Belfast— and proscribing it might have brought little reaction.’ Bew and Gillespie, *Northern Ireland, a Chronology of the Troubles*, p. 12.

45 McAteer did not support the march in Derry on 5 October and warned that it ‘isn’t good marching weather in more than one sense’, *Irish News*, 30 December 1968.

46 *Sunday News*, 29 December 1968.

47 *Irish News*, 31 December 1968.

48 Paddy Devlin, *Straight Left: an autobiography* (Belfast, Blackstaff, 1993), p. 93.

49 *Irish News*, 31 December 1968.

50 Egan and McCormack, *Burntollet* (London, LRS Publishers, 1969).

51 Eamonn McCann took the slogan from ‘You are now entering Free Berkeley’ in Berkeley College, 1965.

52 *Irish News*, 6 January 1969.

53 Cameron Report, para, 100.

54 Thus, while the RUC are criticized, particularly during 5 October (1968) and 5 January (1969) in Derry, they are on the whole exonerated for having ‘acted with commendable discipline and restraint under very great strain and provocation from various quarters’, Cameron Report, Para. 168.

55 The best activist account of the march is found in, Egan and McCormack, *Burntollet* (London, LRS Publishers, 1969). Cameron Report, para 183.

56 Letter from District Inspector Harrison to County Inspector: Civil Rights March from Belfast to Londonderry, 1–4 January 1969, PRONI, CAB/9B/312/5.

57 See, Egan and McCormack, *Burntollet* and Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul*.

58 Evidence submitted to the Cameron enquiry by Robin Chichester-Clark, MP, PRONI, GOV/2/1/252.

59 Evidence submitted by Commander A. W. Anderson MP, to the Cameron inquiry, PRONI, GOV/2/1/102.

60 Evidence submitted to the Cameron enquiry by Robin Chichester-Clark, MP, PRONI, GOV/2/1/252.

61 The three elected were, John Hume, Ivan Cooper and Paddy Devlin.

62 Scarman Report, pp. 121-123.

63 *Ibid*, p. 248.

64 McCann, the roots of revolt, available online, <http://www.marxists.de/ireland/mccann/oct1968.htm>

65 Manifesto of the People’s Democracy, 1969, People’s Democracy file, NIPC.

66 ‘Discussion on the strategy of People’s Democracy’, *New Left Review*, 1969.

67 In 1969 Sinclair released the following statement with other “moderates” after walking off the NICRA committee in protest against the PD: “All we needed was time...a lull in which to see if Captain O’Neill is going to carry out the reforms he had promised. But the PD would not give us time and their political views are infringing on the non-political aims of NICRA...We have been taken over by people preaching the most extreme form of revolutionary socialism, the sort of politics that have been causing trouble in France, Germany, Japan and many other parts of the world.” Arthur, *The People’s Democracy*, p. 61.

68 Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland*, p. 264.

69 *Ibid*, p. 281.

70 As Aaron Edwards explains, ‘Arguably, the NILP was ill equipped to meet the challenges posed by the transformation of politics in the late 1960s... because it was deeply wedded to the process and fundamentals of British parliamentary democracy. As such, it could not (and would not) fathom or condone a turn to street politics or civil disobedience.’ Edwards, *A History of the Northern Ireland Labour Party*, pp. 145-146

71 The timidity of Simpson’s intervention is most striking, endorsing some of Faulkner’s speech he did not speak out against any of the claims surrounding the violence and was on this occasion uncritical of the both the government and the military, calling for, ‘new political initiatives so that we may get to the point in time that violence will not be uppermost in our minds.’ Stormont Hansard, 1 February 1972, Volume 84, pp. 37-38.

72 Geoffrey Bell, *The British in Ireland A Suitable Case for Withdrawal* (London, Pluto Press, 1984), p. 80.

73 Report of a delegation of trade unionists from Belfast Shipyard to Stormont Castle, 29 June 1970, Civil Rights Campaign in Northern Ireland, PRONI, CAB/9B/205/12.

74 For an account of the UWC Strike see, Robert Fisk, *The point of no return: the strike which broke the British in Ulster* (London, Times Books, 1975).

75 Margaret Urwin, *A State in Denial, British Collaboration with Loyalist Paramilitaries*, Mercier Press, 2016.

76 Niall O’ Dochartaigh, *From Civil Rights to Armalites*, p. 311.