UNIONISM AND ITS DISCONTENTS PART TWO

Seān Mitchell

Unionism and Its Discontents

Part Two: Paisleyism & the Decline of Orange Power

Seán Mitchell

On the weekend before his sensational resignation in 1969, an exhausted Terence O'Neill retreated to his palatial estate on the shore of Lough Neagh, desperate to snatch a moment's solitude before announcing the end of his embattled premiership. Peace and quiet may have been hard to come by in those stormy days, but the soon-to-be ex-prime minister was desperately short on luck as well. Sometime after dinner, O'Neill was disturbed by a thunderous "explosion" that shook "the whole house" to its foundations. Believing that his home had been bombed, O'Neill rushed to the RUC sentry tasked with protecting the prime minister in the face of an active death threat from "extremist loyalists". To his astonishment, the constable explained that a great "ball of fire [had] passed over the house"—a meteorite, in fact—"which had come up from the direction of Wales on its way to the North" before falling into the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of County Antrim. It was a startling event, interpreted by O'Neill as "a portent of some kind"—reminiscent, perhaps, of the blazing comets of Revelations that foretold the final judgment.[1]

Supernatural signs were hardly needed for divining that O'Neill was finished by the spring of 1969. But if anyone could lay claim to the gift of prophecy, it was surely his most persistent and implacable nemesis: the Reverend Ian Paisley. The silver-tongued preacher had made himself a formidable obstacle to O'Neill's "liberalising" project, charging the prime minister with complicity in a global conspiracy of "papists," "communists," "liberals," and "homosexuals"—an unholy alliance that would do no less than usher in the reign of the antichrist. Convinced that he'd been entrusted with a heavenly mission, Paisley proclaimed himself "called" by God "to be prophet to his generation."[2] Many of his supporters believed this unconditionally—spellbound by the firebrand's apparent gift of clairvoyance and his impressive record of apocalyptic predictions: Protestants would resist civil rights for Catholics; O'Neill's government would fall under pressure; the IRA would resurrect its campaign of violence; Ulster was facing an existential crisis if it did not change course. All through the early period of his prominence events appeared to confirm his warnings, casting Paisley as a prophet "with an almost messianic destiny," as one Presbyterian cleric put it.[3] In the cold light of hindsight, Paisley's knack for premonition doesn't require supernatural explanation: it was, after all, his own confrontational tactics and verbal incendiarism that made them possible in the first place. Divine providence is redundant when you are already a "self-fulfilling prophet."[4]

The banal presumption that the Troubles were a religious conflict—driven by competing doctrinal interpretation or the fervently held faith of the main protagonists—has been grossly overworked. Marxists are not alone in insisting that any plausible assessment has to grasp the historical roots of sectarian divisions. But Paisley's ascent and then dominance of grassroots unionism, his role as founder of both a church and a mass political movement, sits awkwardly beside the temptation to downplay religion. Doesn't his uniqueness, at least in western European terms, prove that there is something exceptional at work in the North of Ireland: that maybe, after all, the place just can't be understood in conventional terms? Superficially, Paisleyism would appear to confirm Ivor Crewe's suggestion that "Northern Ireland is acutely embarrassing for the Marxist perspective" on account of the "unbridgeable and largely political division within the working class."[5] Class might possess an explanatory power elsewhere, Crewe and others concede, but the main drivers shaping events in the north of Ireland are conflicting national aspirations and deep-rooted cultural and religious identities: these combine to eclipse class conflict at every turn, negating Marxism's claim to explanatory power.

This was clearly the view embraced by Steve Bruce—Paisley's most sympathetic biographer—whose first attempt at explaining his prominence was driven by hostility toward "the Marxist version of that story," wherein religion and nationalism "had been displaced in the modern world by social class."[6] Reaffirming mainstream presumptions, Bruce insisted that "the Northern Ireland conflict is a religious conflict," with Paisley and his followers primarily driven by their Christian fundamentalism. It is a view that cannot be summarily dismissed. Brian Faulkner, Northern Ireland's last ever prime minister, had after all condemned Paisley as a "politico-religious demagogue,"[7] and the unionist *Belfast Telegraph* had in 1966 denounced him as a "Mad Mullah" intent on stoking "religious war."[8] Paisley did little to assuage this perception himself—affirming it not only with his repeated allusions to scriptural authority but also with his rote condemnation of the "modernists and infidels" he alleged were in cahoots with the Vatican.

In his second book on Paisley, Bruce came to qualify his portrait, in tones even more sympathetic than the first. Though his subject was still a devoted Christian fundamentalist, Bruce now stressed "the relatively constrained nature of Paisleyism," in light of an "increasing awareness of what a real jihad looks like". While in his earlier biography Bruce regarded it as urgent to "stress how Paisleyism differed from secular politics," his new work strained to "show how Paisleyism differs both from secular politics and from Islamic fundamentalism."[9] Here the author seems transparently sensitive to the whims of the contemporary Anglo-American imperium, with the argument abridged as follows: There was a conflict in Ireland not as a consequence of British intervention but because of religion. Contrarily, an imperial adventure in the Middle East was presumably inevitable because of the uniquely "backward" nature of the Islamic religion. Thus, it made good sense for the peacemaker Tony Blair to swoon over the "Moderate Mullah" Paisley, but nothing less than carpet bombing might shift the unrestrained fundamentalists in the Middle East.

Aside from the egregious hypocrisy here, there is good reason to doubt that a theological reductionism can account for the genesis and trajectory of Paisleyism. In 2007, Paisley entered coalition with Sinn Féin—a breathtaking reversal from a man whose leitmotif over decades in the public eye had been "No surrender" and "Never". How do we explain this extraordinary volte-face if a unique scriptural interpretation was all that motivated Paisley? The explanations are plentiful, if conceptually thin: a life-altering illness that caused Paisley to see the light; the irresistible charm of Tony Blair, who convinced the Loyalist to cut a deal; the Rasputinian influence of his wife, Eileen, who pushed her diminished husband into a rapprochement he would otherwise have refused; the Machiavellian manoeuvres of those grouped around Peter Robinson, desperate for the perks of ministerial office; or, arguably the most prevalent explanation, was it simply the "Big Man's" insatiable ego, as Ed Moloney insinuated: "Was Ian Paisley possibly the only member of his flock who never really or fully believed his own gospel?"[10] Was Paisley's capitulation the result of "his great ambition to achieve office," in other words, "and a willingness to sacrifice theological, and presumably political, principle in its pursuit?"[11]

Some if not all of the above no doubt played a role in nudging Paisley towards the negotiation table. As rounded explanations of Paisley's trajectory, however, they are risibly superficial. In particular, they fail to account for the myriad objective factors that have curtailed the options available to Unionist leaders and compelled them to consider choices they would have otherwise avoided. Crewe's facile assertion notwithstanding, the phenomenon of Paisley is not an "embarrassment" to the Marxist perspective but a protracted confirmation of the compelling power of objective forces in human history. Indeed, there is no other way to account for the unique origins of Paisleyism and its development thereafter than by situating it within its material context and examining the particular social forces that propelled it.

This article traces the class origins of Paisleyism—located in the material decay of Unionist hegemony (examined in Part One) —the political consequences that flowed from this, and their interaction with the legacy of a British-backed discriminatory state. Doing

so allows for an explanation of the persistence of Loyalist reaction, and also demonstrates why Paisleyism was, paradoxically, one of the first symptoms of an inexorable decline in the Orange power that underpinned it—finding its most dramatic political expression in the Damascene turn of 2007. In doing so, we won't deny the unique agency of the Paisleyite project—or indeed Paisley himself—but stress how this subjectivity was fuelled, and eventually constrained, by a constellation of objective factors emanating from the deep, historic crisis of Unionism. To invert Marx's well-known dictum to fit the regressive nature of the Paisleyite project: people can hold back history, but not in circumstances of their own choosing.

The prophet arrives

No celestial events accompanied the birth of Loyalism's prophet of doom. Paisley was born into a modest two-storied, terraced house in Armagh, and later raised by strict evangelical parents in the largely Protestant town of Ballymena. Paisley's father was a Baptist pastor and a product of the wave of "revivalism" that swept Ulster in the early twentieth century, inspired by a similar movement in the United States. His congregation attracted sections of rural Ulster, where traditionalism and the family structure were closely interwoven with the economic fabric of a fairly isolated agricultural life.

Even in the 1920s and 1930s, Paisley's upbringing was something of a throwback: he was raised in an atmosphere of born-again Calvinism and anti-cosmopolitanism, with the cultural trappings of modernity—cinema, dances, and popular music—frowned upon as heathenish distractions unbecoming of a member of God's flock. The young Ian was said to be an unremarkable child, but he developed an imposing stature in his teens and something of a reputation as a small-time bully, which no doubt assisted him in the creation of the confident, larger than life persona for which he would become famous.

Paisley followed in his father's footsteps to become a man of the cloth. By chance, he was assigned to Wales for a year's apprenticeship, where he cut his teeth preaching to dockers and seamen—a training that would prove invaluable for honing his oratory rapport with a mass, working-class audience from early on.[12] Upon his return in 1945, he was invited to become a preacher for Ravenhill Evangelical Mission Church, a small independent congregation in East Belfast.[13] Paisley was to become a popular figure on the evangelical circuit at the fringes of Northern Protestantism—an enduring legacy of the mass revivals of the 1920s led by the "tornado of the pulpit," W.P. Nicholson, who had conducted mass workplace-based preaching and big tent revival meetings in the aftermath of partition, particularly in East Belfast. In 1949, Paisley claimed something of a religious experience, and after a period of prayer declared himself "filled with the holy spirit" and the "possessor of a new evangelistic power."[14] In 1951, he founded the Free Presbyterian Church—a small denomination devoted to preaching the bible as the literal word of God. The "Free Ps" developed a cantankerous and sometimes openly hostile relationship to other trends within Protestantism and a following among those critical of a turn towards ecumenism.[15]

Paisley was at this time very much on the margins of Ulster Protestantism. He was the latest in a long line of incendiary Loyalist preachers—Canon Thomas Drew, Reverend Henry Cooke, "Roaring" Hugh Hanna—who exploited plebeian Protestant discontent with "Big House" elites by calling for an intensification of sectarianism against the Catholic population. In some respects, Paisleyism can be situated within the unique position of Presbyterianism in Ireland and its relative independence from other Protestant denominations—particularly the Church of Ireland, which was the predominant creed among landed elites.[16] Paisley was not really a Presbyterian, however, in any classical sense—he was "invited" into the denomination, prompting the accusation from other Presbyterians that he was "self-ordained."[17] This ambiguity could lend itself to a shunning of Paisley, but it also afforded him a certain degree of denominational elasticity that conceivably broadened his political appeal. As he put it himself: "I don't think that the emphasis is on denominational ordination. I think the emphasis is on a Christian minister."[18]

The two pillars of Paisley's theology were a proselytising evangelism and separatism. What held these two seemingly contradictory impulses together was Paisley's virulent anti-Catholicism. The rapture might be confined to the enlightened few, but this eventuality required the continuation of a Protestant Ascendancy that could shield it from an increasingly hostile world. Politics and theology were neatly aligned in Paisley's worldview, therefore: "God has a people in this province. There are more born-again people in Ulster to the square mile that anywhere else in the world. This little province has had the peculiar preservation of divine Providence."[19] "Just when it seemed humanly impossible to extricate Ulster from seeming disaster," he wrote, "God intervened."[20]

Paisley's intention was to "save" all Protestant people, but his separatist antics—including picketing other churches—put him at odds with other denominations, with one rival cleric accusing him of "ministerial hooliganism."[21] These confrontational tactics would result in Paisley's effective expulsion from the Orange Order in 1951, when they disbarred Free Presbyterians from becoming lay chaplains in lodges. Paisley would continue to be a popular speaker at Orange parades and within certain lodges in the years after.[22] Nevertheless, his status as something of an outlier in Unionism—with one foot in and one foot out—afforded him a degree of independence that would prove critical to his political growth.

In many other contexts, Paisley would have remained on the margins of religious extremity. Even at its height, the Free Presbyterian Church never had more than 10,000 members—and it's likely even that number is an overestimate. That said, aspects of Paisley's theology—not least his anti-Catholicism and the apocalyptic eschatology that accompanied his sermons—spoke to the unique circumstances of a minority of Protestants in this period, materially if not spiritually. Like Amos and Isaiah, Paisley warned of an impending catastrophe if Ulster did not repent. To some—particularly small farmers, sections of the petit bourgeoisie threatened by the arrival of multinationals, and a minority of workers concerned with the decline of stable employment—Paisley's prophetic warnings appeared to match their circumstances in a rapidly changing society.

Class basis of Paisleyism

Paisley's most stable and enduring support base was located in rural Ulster—those who worked in farming or lived in small, overwhelmingly Protestant towns like his own in Ballymena—where both evangelical Christianity and Orangeism had deep roots. But the cockpit of his political project was undoubtedly Belfast, particularly in the critical period before the onset of conflict.

Paisley's first biographer suggests that his "early contacts with shipyard workers and dockers of limited education and strong range prejudices, maintained through fear of Catholic integration in their industrial reserves, revealed to [Paisley] the vast potential of a militant working class so minded."[23] Perhaps this is true, but it needs the important qualification that the bulk of Protestant workers were not simply glad-handed pawns for the proselytising preacher. As Marrinan concedes, Paisley had to contend with a diverse range of political viewpoints inside the Protestant working class—including significant currents of labourism and smaller pockets of socialism—whose very existence posed a challenge to Unionist orthodoxy and the stability of an "all-class alliance":

> In his early missionary years in the docklands of Belfast, Paisley came in contact with members of the Labour Party and found that although most of them were nominally Protestant nearly all were Laodicean in their Orangeism. Some were atheists, some agnostics and among them was a liberal sprinkling of Communists. The latter, for some reason hard to account for, frequently gravitated towards Irish Republicanism. To win this assorted crew over would be a difficult task, and his industry and enthusiasm would be stretched to the limit to do it.[24]

In popular nationalist appraisals, Paisleyism is often viewed as little more than an irrational and bigoted expression of anti-Catholicism. That it was indeed sometimes irrational—often pathetically so—and thoroughly bigoted in its treatment of the minority community, is unquestionably true.[25] The above quote

suggests another critical feature often neglected within this widely held perception, however: Paisleyism was not only defined by its anti-Catholicism but by the manner in which it exploited this sectarianism in order to isolate currents of radicalism within the Protestant community itself.

This was not a particularly new dynamic. The Orange Order had been founded and promoted, after all, to defeat a Protestant-led rebellion in 1798, and later deployed as a useful means for keeping workers divided; Henry Cooke emerged not only to resist Catholic emancipation but also to displace liberalism with Toryism inside the Protestant community; Ulster Protestant Association and the Ulster Protestant League (UPL) were ostensibly formed to resist republicanism and a united Ireland, but also to counter the brief explosions of working-class solidarity in 1919 and 1932. Catholics undoubtedly bore the brunt of Paisleyite agitation, therefore, but the less apparent —though equally important—targets were the "lundies" and "rotten prods" critical of Unionist heterodoxy, including socialists, communists, republicans, feminists, and labourists.[26] Therein lays the importance of anti-Catholicism to the Paisleyite project—useful as a vehicle for polarising politics along sectarian lines, for corralling Protestant workers behind a conservative banner, and for cleansing their ranks of subversives.

Two examples from Paisley's early political career give a flavour of Paisleyism writ small. The first was his formative activism as a leader of the National Union of Protestants (NUP)—a group Paisley helped launch in Belfast in 1946 in order to safeguard the principle of "Northern Ireland [as] a Protestant country for a Protestant people."[27] NUP meetings were conducted in an atmosphere "of strong and occasionally hysterical anti-Catholicism, sometimes accompanied by a dose of the anti-Communism of the early Cold War years."[28] As a leader of the NUP, Paisley learned how to exploit class discontent with those at the top of society by misdirecting it against Catholics. He warned against allowing Catholics to buy Protestant property, for example, and called on the Protestant business class to provide capital for poorer Protestants to buy property and farms.

Paisley's first foray into electoral politics is also revealing. He became involved in the 1949 campaign for the largely working-class Dock ward in Belfast—where Tommy Cole, a wealthy chemist and Unionist, was attempting to unseat Hugh Downey, a Catholic barman and member of the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP). Cole realised that his wealthy status offered little to the working-class voters of the Dock, and was advised to draft Paisley in to run the campaign in the area. Paisley accepted, and toured the constituency, warning of Vatican plots to sink the constituency into deprivation. He arranged for posters to be distributed, with Downey represented as a penalty shooter, alongside the tag line "Which way will he kick?"—with one arrow pointing to "Northern Ireland and prosperity," and another to "The republic and poverty." The defensive labour unionism of the post-war NILP offered no riposte to this accusation. Later, Cole would confess that he could not have unseated Labour without his new advocate: "To the working class unionists of Dock, Paisley was a revelation."[29]

These early excursions illustrate the elementary functionality of Paisleyism—not as an expression of class politics but as its negation. Thus Paisley's politics might have had an underlying class element, but the consequence of his intervention was the weakening of independent working-class organisation to the benefit of a middle-class-led Unionism. Bruce suggests an analogy in the tradition of "independent unionism" represented by the likes of Tommy Henderson—the former Shankill MP, who adopted an eyes-averted posture towards discrimination but supported a vague and innocuous approach to economic questions.[30] This is much too banal a portrait, however—not least because Paisley once admonished a rival Unionist for sharing a platform with Henderson on account of his fondness for a drink.[31]

Rather than Henderson, the closest person to a muse for Paisley was D.I. Nixon—the rabid Loyalist who had been expelled from the RUC and was believed to have been involved with an infamous sectarian murder gang during the anti-Catholic pogroms of the twenties. In 1929, Nixon was elected as an independent

Unionist, later becoming a key figure in the UPL—a violent Loyalist organisation that played a crucial role in fermenting sectarianism after a brief but important period of working-class unity during the Great Depression.[32] Paisley considered himself a "friend and admirer of Nixon" and praised him as the "most able and effective politician" he knew.[33]

The Protestant working class was not simply available for the taking by Paisley. Nevertheless, certain features of the sectarian Northern Irish state worked to Paisley's favour—not least the long tradition of Unionist elites responding to Loyalist agitation by tightening the levers of discrimination, and the structural imbalance towards Unionism within the Northern Irish polity. This is subtly demonstrated by the event that first brought Paisley to national prominence in 1956: the "abduction" of Maura Lyons. Lyons, a fifteen-year-old girl from West Belfast who briefly converted to Protestantism under the influence of Paisley, was famously kidnapped in order to prevent her "re-indoctrination" by the Catholic Church.

Unsurprisingly, most accounts focus on the sensationalist aspects of this story. More revealing, however, is what it says about the political economy of the North. Maura was a low-paid, unskilled worker, employed as a stitcher at the Star Clothing Company on Belfast's Donegall Road. At lunch time, Loyalist preachers, including Paisley, would be given free rein to evangelise before a mixed workforce. It is not a question of whether Catholicism or Protestantism was a more "progressive" choice for Lyons—the Catholic Church was hardly a refuge for young working-class women, after all—but of acknowledging the blatant structural imbalance towards Loyalism in the North. No serious observer could dispute the famous "independent agency" of Paisleyism or Loyalism more broadly so long as it is recognised that this agency operated within a political economy that was already tilted in its favour. Paisley was simply pursuing a more aggressive version of a deeply sectarian politics that saturated the Northern Ireland state and all the leading institutions in the North.

The conspiracy theorist

Paisley's habit of ventriloquising class discontent was critical to another group he led: Ulster Protestant Action (UPA), an organisation concerned with increasing mixing between Protestants and Catholics and which pursued an intensification of sectarian discrimination as the antidote. The context of its emergence was the early stages of declining industry in the North, a corresponding rise in unemployment, and a significant increase in the NILP vote.

The UPA was founded by veteran Loyalists, including 1930s-era leaders of the UPL, and was determined to block any openings to the left inside the Protestant working class. The UPA's constitution declared that the group was "primarily dedicated to immediate action in the sphere of employment," which, as the *Irish Times* explained, meant "simply to have a Protestant employed or given overtime or not sacked, rather than a Catholic." The UPA's support was largely "urban working class in an occupational area which had traditionally been dominated by Protestants, the petit bourgeoisie, and evangelical Protestants."[34]

The UPA managed to garner some support—claiming some 2000 members at its height and occasionally drawing large crowds to its rallies in the Ulster Hall. Like the UPL before it, however, the UPA had a significant element of middle-class involvement, with pastors, politicians, barristers, foremen, and small-business people all playing a significant role. Additionally, it could rely on the financial support of individuals from the lower echelons of the business community, with one branch offering interest-free loans to Protestant families who couldn't afford a deposit for a house. William Wilton, a prosperous undertaker from the Shankill, was a key figure, granting the UPA access to his funeral home for meetings.

The leadership of important sections of the Protestant middle class in the UPA introduces an important qualification, contradicting popular explanations for Loyalism that invariably stress its working-class character. Part of this can be explained by the predominance of a kind of ill-defined, spatial concept of class in the North—just as there are "Catholic" and

"Protestant" areas, so too there are ostensibly "working-class Catholic" and "working-class Protestant" districts. There is a certain validity to this shorthand, in that areas like the Falls or the Shankill are indeed predominately working class. But it also tends towards an oversimplification of class, with one consequence being the repeated underestimation of the role of a communal middle class—whose position relied on or was strengthened by the maintenance of segregation—in politics in the North.

Paisley and the UPA put the rise of unemployment down to an imaginary "Catholic Action" that had infiltrated the state and which was "stealing" Protestant jobs, and to the connivance of a Unionist elite that had gone soft on the old enemy. As Paisley put it, "The rank and file of the Ulster people are still loyal to the core" but "we have been badly led, both politically and religiously." The illusory nature of "Catholic Action" and the unstable class divisions underpinning Paisleyism encouraged it to lean heavily on a conspiratorial worldview—a recurrent feature of his politics over the next few decades. Unemployment could not be blamed on capitalism (as they had small-time capitalists in their own ranks), and the civil rights movement could not be blamed on the structural inequalities of the Orange state (as they intended to defend its existence): in place of rational and obvious explanations, Paisleyism habitually resorted to the most outlandish conspiratorialism, with a vernacular style easily available in an already familiar Christian fundamentalism.

It was necessary to invent secret plots and shadowy figures, therefore, that could exculpate Orangeism from any responsibility, and to equip Paisley's supporters with an explanation for the changing world around them. When Paisley was imprisoned in 1966 for refusing to pay a fine, for example, he claimed it was the "result of a conspiracy hatched by the World Council of Churches, leaders of the Irish Presbyterian Church and the Government of Northern Ireland."[35] Journalists were another target. Paisley's paper, the *Revivalist*, claimed the BBC was under the sway "partly of Romanists and partly [of] modernists and infidels,"[36] with the wider press wholly comprised of a mix of "Roman Catholics," "brainless mongoloids," "sandal-wearing homosexuals," and journalists "who carry secret membership cards of the Communist Party."[37]

These reactionary rantings enhanced Paisley's stature among increasingly marginalised White, conservative segregationists in the United States.[38] Paisley developed close links with the all-white Bob Jones University (which awarded him an honorary doctorate), with its namesake and president Bob Jones Jr describing Paisley as "one of the Godliest men I have ever met."[39] As Brian Kelly notes: "The 'siege mentality' so evident among bitter-end segregationists at Bob Jones and across the US South resonated for Paisley and his followers, and white Southerners in turn commiserated with their Ulster brethren in their attempts to face down the 'Fenian' hordes clamouring for reform."[40] To counter a visit to the US by Bernadette Devlin, described by him as "Fidel Castro in a mini skirt," Paisley delivered a lecture at Bob Jones's segregated campus, where he warned:

> Listen, my friends. What is happening in Ulster today will happen in America tomorrow. Make no mistake about it. O may God open our eyes to see the conspiracy, the international conspiracy, that is among us! May He help us to see that there is a deliberate association of attacks against law and order and for revolution and anarchy in the land![41]

Paisley's frequent resort to conjuring imaginary enemies helps explain his tendency to constantly inflate the threat from republicans: he was forever predicting that the IRA was on the verge of a renewed armed campaign. In reality, as is well known, after the debacle of its border campaign the republican movement had moved decisively away from armed struggle under the influence of left intellectuals like Roy Johnston. In a letter to the minister of home affairs dated 22 June, 1966, marked secret and seen by the prime minister, RUC inspector general A.H. Kennedy warned that "a serious situation would appear to be developing in Northern Ireland" that constituted a "real threat to the peace of the Province." Interestingly, this "threat to peace" did not emanate from the IRA but from what Kennedy called the "Paisley section":

> While there is always the IRA and its splinter groups in the background ready to seize any opportunity to disturb the peace, the fact is that an equal or even greater threat is posed at present by extremist Protestant groups, many of whom are members of loyalist organisations. These are the people whom it may be possible to reach at meetings of the Loyal Orange Order and other similar bodies, and it may be that leaders of Protestant Churches could also play their part before it is too late.[42]

In the absence of a tangible target, in the mid-1960s Paisley and his supporters would instigate a string of calculated confrontations over symbolic matters like flags and place names. For example, after the Union Jack was flown at half mast in respect for the death of the pope, Loyalists organised a protest, with Paisley declaring from the platform that such a thing was unacceptable as "[Belfast] City Hall was our property." In 1966, Paisley engineered a further controversy over the naming of a bridge over the River Lagan in Belfast, demanding it be called Carson Bridge. When Stormont refused, Paisley decried it as sell-out and arranged for Carson's son to be flown over to speak at rallies.

Later that year came the infamous dispute over the flying of a tricolour near the Falls Road. Paisley vowed to march on the republican premises where the flag was displayed from a window if the RUC did not remove it, which they eventually did, to riotous result. This was to become an established pattern, with Paisley threatening violence or mobilising Loyalists on to the streets to heap pressure on the Unionists or British government to enforce a tougher stance on Catholics, republicans, or even at times the socialist left.

Paisley and the Left

Revived sectarian organisation was not the only product of Unionist hegemonic decay. Throughout the late fifties and early sixties, there was a growth in industrial struggle, a rise in votes for Labour, and a sustained campaign against redundancies.[43] The UPA had its support inside the Protestant working class certainly, but there was also a very sizeable presence of Labour supporters and a much smaller—though disproportionately influential—cadre of communists. This suggests the necessity of a more dynamic and contingent conceptualisation of Protestant working-class politics in the period—one that acknowledges the distorting influence of Unionist patronage and discrimination on class consciousness, but which is also capable of identifying the divisions within the Protestant community itself and the occasional opportunities for class politics that it brought in its train.

This explains why Paisleyism made so much of the threat of the Lundy, the traitor to Loyalism. As Gusty Spence—a fellow UPA member and later founder of the UVF—explains: "If you didn't vote Unionist, weren't in the Orange Order and didn't support the Blues [Linfield soccer club] on the Shankill Road, you were regarded with suspicion as probably a communist."[44] By contrast, the battalions of the labour movement allowed the trend toward Paisleyism inside the working class to go mostly unchallenged. As Milotte notes, some of the trade union–organised demonstrations against redundancies in this period had Paisleyites on their platforms, "for whom the defence of shipyard jobs meant the defence of Protestant privilege." The union leaders were "completely immersed in the day-to-day economic struggles for the defence of jobs in the Protestant-dominated contracting industries," Milotte continues, but failed to "challenge the deep-seated pro-British and loyalist sentiments" among sections of the working class.[45]

Even the Communist Party—which had developed a small but relatively impressive following among sections of Protestant workers—believed Paisley was an irrelevance, owing to a mechanical materialism which insisted that the rise of monopoly capitalism had definitively undercut Loyalism's base. As the communist Billy McCullough put it in 1966: "To see Mr. Paisley's venture into political activity as the main enemy of the democratic advance of people is to see the mouse and miss the elephant."[46] This perspective ignored the class dynamics outlined earlier, and underestimated the potential of the crisis of Unionist hegemony to generate schisms to its right as well as its left. As Milotte observed, "The Protestant petty

bourgeoisie were reacting to the blows from multi-national capitalism by blaming their plight on uppity Catholics (and their unionist 'fur-coat' brigade appeasers) and were turning increasingly to Paisley, who stood for the old order and who was now making a bid for Protestant working-class support with traditional sectarian politics."[47]

Any explanation of the material and structural dynamics that gave rise to Paisleyism should not ignore the subjective side of history. It is against this backdrop that we should reconsider Patrick Marrinan's depiction of Paisley as a kind of "loyalist Lenin". Marrinan meant this as an insult, of course, speculating that Paisley's "strong sense of social inferiority had alienated him from the upper classes" and led him to identify as "the soul, conscience, and mind of the Protestant proletariat."[48] These kinds of flimsy psychological profiles are a recurring feature of the "great-men theory of history" and consequently of little use. But it is possible to recast the analogy—not with Paisley as a Loyalist Lenin but with Paisleyism as a kind of *negated Leninism*.

Paisleyism, like the Leninist left, was very much a "fringe" political current in the sixties: one opinion poll in 1967 suggested that 90 per cent of the population, and perhaps 84 per cent of Protestants, were opposed to Paisley.[49] But it is also the case that Paisley entered the turbulent days of the late sixties with considerably stronger roots than the radical left: with hundreds of activists, thousands at public meetings, and a widely read newspaper, the *Protestant Telegraph*. Without question, the early days of civil rights agitation demonstrated the potential space for radical socialist politics, but this wasn't matched by any serious level of organisation or opposition to sectarian trends inside the working class in the years prior. If Paisleyism represented a negation of class politics, then the development of one alternative to the status quo required a confrontation with the other—something Paisley himself grasped. Milotte expresses the proposition succinctly: "The tide of *potential* Protestant working-class radicalism embodied in the industrial struggles of the early 1960s had been turned, not just by Paisleyism, but by the absence of any viable left-wing alternative."[50]

The "Protestant backlash"

A distorted class dynamic underpinned the "Protestant backlash" against civil rights. A 1967 *Belfast Telegraph* poll suggested Paisley drew his support from among skilled and semi-skilled male Presbyterian workers in Belfast, "who felt most threatened by the changing climate around them and most nostalgic for the certitudes of traditional unionism."[51] By contrast, the Unionist government "was mainly composed of country gentry and commercial magnates."[52] As one Unionist later explained:

> [Terence O'Neill] was 'Big House', with servants and all that goes with it. That put him out of touch with ordinary people. I remember talking to a journalist who went to Ahoghill to see what people there thought of him. The local grocer told him the nearest sight he ever had of O'Neill was of his wife riding down the main street on her horse.[53]

This class tension within Unionism was reciprocal. Even among those on the right of the Unionist Party, sceptical of O'Neill's liberalism, there was considerable concern with the impact of Paisley's antics on the all-class nature of the project. As Brian Faulkner put it: "The Unionist Party had started off as a vehicle for the mobilisation of the entire spectrum of pro-union opinion in Ulster…Landlords and peers, businessmen and professional men, farmers, labourers and industrial workers all sat together in the associations and central organs of the party."[54] By the mid- and late sixties, Faulkner bemoaned, Paisley was chasing off capitalist investors: "As a representative of the province who travelled abroad seeking to attract industrialists to a modern go-ahead Ulster I was acutely aware of how badly these ugly events were affecting our image. Ian Paisley and I were basically in competition."[55] It was this tug of war between the bourgeois and petit bourgeois components of Unionism that eventually pulled the all-class alliance apart.

Earthquakes are caused by shifting tectonic plates below the surface, but the nature and sturdiness of the structures above determines their consequences thereafter. Paisley would test the structural soundness

of the North—becoming the most persistent and disruptive opponent of civil rights, and certainly the first to insist that the movement was a Trojan horse for IRA subversion. Effectively from the inception of the movement in October 1968, non-violent student demonstrations regularly faced organised abuse—both verbal and physical—from Paisley's followers.[56]

At one major civil rights demonstration in Armagh, on 30 November 1968, civil rights protestors were prevented from marching in the town by hundreds of Paisleyites who had descended on the town early that morning armed with cudgels and bats. The high point—or perhaps the low point—of this Paisleyite agitation came in January 1969, when non-violent student demonstrators were brutally beaten at Burntollet Bridge during a march from Belfast to Derry. Paisley was at the centre of these events, alongside his then right-hand subordinate, Major Ronald Bunting, who encouraged the "loyal citizens of Ulster" to "harry and harass" the march.[57] Paisley continued to court and embolden some of the most sectarian elements of militant Loyalism, as events in August 1969 would tragically attest.[58]

Academic historians would come to endorse a victim-blaming narrative regarding these events—holding nationalists and naïve young leftists responsible for setting the match to Ulster's sectarian tinderbox, but this contrasts with the contemporary view of Terence O'Neill, who reasoned that "if Ulster does not survive, then historians may well show that it was the Protestant extremists, yearning for the days of the Protestant Ascendancy, who lit the flame which blew us up."[59] As O'Neill himself conceded, the tactics of the radical left at Burntollet were no less adversarial than those employed by Paisley over many years previously. That the latter have now been chalked up as a "reaction" to the former by many historians shows nothing less than a wilful evasion of basic historical chronology.

Right-wing social movement

The violent consequences of Paisleyism posed the question as to its political nature, with a number of his opponents (including O'Neill) accusing him of fascism: "To those of us who remember the Thirties, the pattern is horribly familiar." O'Neill described Paisleyism as "a fascist organisation masquerading under the cloak of religion,"[60] a view shared by his parliamentary colleague Phelim O'Neill, who compared Paisley's ascent to the rise of Hitler.[61] Some rival Protestant clergy concurred: Donald Soper, a political moderate and president of the Methodist Church, called Paisley a fascist, as did the Presbyterian moderator Austin Fulton.[62]

Political opponents hurled the insult too, including Paisley's occasional ally and sometimes opponent Bob McCartney. Unionist leaders evidently preferred to regard Paisleyism as something wholly alien rather than as a product of the sectarian state they themselves had constructed. Much as his rhetoric and actions sometimes had a fascistic quality to them, however, Paisleyism is much more accurately comprehended within the framework of what Neil Davidson called a "right wing social movement"—a reactionary populism led by "sections of the professional middle class" that "tends to combine workers in unstable alliances with sections of the petit bourgeoisie," and generates "expressions of misdirected hostility towards perceived ruling class interests."[63]

The raison d'être of Paisleyism was not to replace the ruling class, therefore—which would have required a confrontation with the British state—but to push Stormont and later the British government continually to the right by leveraging the threat of violence and street protest. As Paisley once put it, "We demand that the IRA be exterminated from Ulster…there are men willing to do the job of exterminating the IRA. Recruit them under the Crown and they will do it. If you refuse, we will have no other decision to make but to do it ourselves."[64] This explains Paisley's on-again, off-again relationship with Loyalist paramilitaries: courting them to bolster his political weight at times of crisis, but unwilling to tie himself to their armed campaign indefinitely.

Many of the founding members of the UVF were former members of Paisley's UPA. When Hugh Arnold McClean was arrested for the killing of two Catholic barmen in an early UVF murder, he was reported to have said: "I am terribly sorry about this. I am ashamed of myself. I am sorry I ever heard tell of

that man Paisley or decided to follow him. I am definitely ashamed of myself to be in such a position."[65] Later, Paisley would collaborate with paramilitaries in the Ulster Workers Council (UWC) strike, and he even created his own quasi-paramilitary organisation, Ulster Resistance. But he always kept a certain distance from paramilitarism—pushing just as far as he could go without cornering himself into an irreversible confrontation with the British state.

Ulster Workers' Council strike

A focus on the objective factors in history does not invalidate Machiavelli's famous observation that once a chain of events is established, it tends to take on a life of its own. This was unquestionably true of armed conflict in the North—oppression bred resistance, violence begot violence, with events quickly spiralling into a protracted and unwinnable war. Sedative generalisations about the culpability of "both sides" offer little explanation as to the origins of the conflict and invariably act as a "get out of jail free" card for powerful state forces that helped create it: not only through the creation of the sectarian Orange state in the first place but also through a rotten legacy of state repression, including internment, Bloody Sunday, the Ballymurphy massacre, and two decades of state collusion with Loyalist paramilitaries.[66] For our purposes, however, it suffices to acknowledge that once the armed conflict was set in motion, it became mutually reinforcing thereafter. This is surely why the IRA never assassinated Paisley: he was one of their best recruitment tools. And it is also why the ranks of Loyalism swelled in the early seventies as atrocities like Bloody Friday created a groundswell of revulsion.

In 1971, Paisley founded the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP)—both as a means to challenge elections but also as a way to head off any threat to his dominance within oppositional Unionism (such as Bill Craig's Vanguard Unionist Party). In line with its Paisleyite roots, the DUP was to "be right-wing on law and order," but according to its first strategist, Desmond Boal, it would hold "radical social and economic policies which could embrace all people."[67] Boal was exaggerating here, but the DUP's occasional populism on economic questions has often beguiled observers, with some interpreting Paisleyism and other trends of Loyalism as a particularly Northern Irish refraction of labourism inside the working class. The "left-wing" nature of the DUP should not be overestimated, however, with the party supporting regressive economic policies on countless occasions. Referring to the prospect of a Labour government in 1979, Paisley "said that he trusted that God would deliver Ulster from the curse of socialism which was against the scriptural teachings and he prayed that soon in Britain we might see the return of a Conservative government."[68]

The pinnacle of the "Protestant backlash" undoubtedly came in the 1974 Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) strike—an action designed to collapse Northern Ireland's first power-sharing administration after the Sunningdale Agreement, and led by a coalition of Paisleyites, the Orange Order, the right wing of the Unionist Party, Bill Craig's Vanguard Unionists, and Loyalist paramilitaries.[69] The UWC action was not a classical general strike by any definition, however. On the first day of the action, an estimated 80 per cent of workers showed up for work. A number of factors transformed the situation. Firstly, while there is no doubt that the UWC strike had support among a minority of Loyalist workers, for the most part the strike's success resulted from widespread paramilitary intimidation:

> At the shipyards only 50-100 men out of 10,000 voted in favour of the strike on the day after it was supposed to begin. Threats that workers' cars would be burned if the yards were not empty by 2.30 p.m. succeeded where calls for support had failed. The man who moved the strike-support resolution was a foreman. In Shorts, UWC supporters were spreading rumours among the majority of workers, who did not support the strike, so that there was an atmosphere of fear and uncertainty in which workers drifted out of the factory and back to their homes. Mackies factory, where 98 per cent of the workers are Protestant, closed down only after 200 UDA men, masked and armed with cudgels and guns, marched in and ordered everyone out. The huge Michelin tyre factory was closed by similar tactics—several workers who refused to support the strike ended up

> in hospital, some seriously injured. In Derry, Catholic workers attempting to get to work were met at a loyalist barricade by a force of British soldiers who fired rubber bullets at the workers as they tried to break through the road block. They were driven back from work by the army.[70]

Then prime minister Brian Faulkner suggests that many small businesses were closed in the same manner: "Men in paramilitary 'uniform', sometimes wearing masks and carrying cudgels, walked into shops and simply ordered shopkeepers to close…The evidence of Province-wide intimidation is now so well documented that supporters of the strike scarcely bother to deny it."[71] That said, the UWC "strike" was unique in that it had some business figures among its leadership and "a large number of businessmen and middle-class professionals tacitly co-operated with the strikers in return for being able to pursue some of their normal business."[72]

Lastly, the success of the strike was greatly assisted by the passivity or collaboration of sections of the state. Faulkner bemoaned the fact that the RUC "were doing very little" to stop Loyalist paramilitary intimidation; indeed, he accepts, "there were cases where RUC men showed sympathy with the strikers."[73] Faulkner requested that the British Army intervene, but they refused, telling the prime minister they "should not get involved in a second front by taking on the paramilitary Protestants."[74] Management at the Ballylumford power station—which the UWC had shut down, leading to widespread electricity outages—offered to keep power running if the British government could provide protection from the army. Had this offer been accepted, it would have severely weakened the action. But again, the military brass refused.

Class contradictions

The UWC brought down power-sharing, but what would replace it? UDA brigadier and UWC leader Glen Barr boasted during the strike, "We are in a position to set up a provisional government." Faulkner considered Barr to be "exaggerating" but "only a little,"[75] adding that Stormont had "lost its authority and the junta at Hawthornden Road, the UWC headquarters, established theirs."[76] Faulkner considered the UWC action to be "more an attempted putsch than a strike," with many on the left presuming it was a prelude to a "fascist takeover."[77] The UWC divided between those who felt that they had achieved their goal when Stormont fell and those who wanted the strike continued until the old one-party state was resurrected.

Understandably, sections of the Marxist left interpreted the UWC strike as a sign that Orangeism had restored its position as "the dominant force in Northern politics" and that Britain, "once the master in the Northern State, is fast becoming the servant of the Ulster loyalists."[78] This view was no doubt bolstered by the British state's collusion with Loyalists in the decades that followed. The fascist takeover never arrived, however, because such a thing would have required a confrontation with the British state—something most Unionist leaders would never countenance. Though they were unwilling to challenge the Loyalists, the British were not going to resurrect Stormont in its old form. Late in the strike, Paisley flew to Canada for a funeral—with Loyalist paramilitaries accusing him of deserting. In reality, his absconding was consistent with Paisley's right-wing populism—willing to go as far as he could without making a total break with the British state. The UWC strike undoubtedly brought Stormont down. Without the active support of the British government—whose support ensured the creation of a Northern parliament in the first place—it was in no position to construct something new.

This suggests a palpable decline in Orange power compared with its high point at partition, as Alan O'Day remarks: "In retrospect [the UWC strike] was the swansong of the unionist all-class alliance. The factors that held this—occasionally acrimonious—alliance together were already crumbling under the impact of impersonal economic forces."[79] The UWC undoubtedly demonstrated Loyalism's persistence, but it was also the first confirmation that its social weight was waning. 1974 was not 1912, in other words, and much as they could cause murder and mayhem, the paramilitaries of the seventies were not on the scale and strength of the 100,000 strong, cross-class

colossus of the old UVF. The UWC strike widened the chasm between "certain big business elements in the regime [who] are prepared to see a modicum of democratic rights advanced to Catholics [and] other layers of the Orange structure [who] regard such concessions as a sell-out." Brian Faulkner recalls the concern within the local capitalist class about "the long-term damage such a stoppage could do to the chances of new investment and to the ability of firms to meet orders."[80]

This class-centred schism was clearly demonstrated in 1977 when Paisley sought to replicate the UWC strike. The action was not a total failure: Ballymena, Coleraine, Lurgan, and Portadown came to standstill, Larne port was closed, and some isolated workplaces in Belfast were shut. But the vast majority of workplaces remained open, with shipyard workers voting against participation. The '77 strike involved many of the same players as the UWC action—Paisley's DUP and the Loyalist paramilitaries at its core—but it lacked the kind of "respectable" support afforded to the 1974 action by the Orange Order and the presence of the right of the Unionist Party.

This contradiction came to head when Paisley went to Ballylumford power station—the citadel of the UWC action—to persuade workers to walk out. Three Ulster Unionist MPs—Robert Bradford, Harold McCusker, and James Molyneaux—visited the next day and urged workers to keep electricity going. The pan-Unionist alliance of 1974 had clearly fractured, with those close to the business community getting cold feet about another round of economic disruption—exemplified by the unlikely accusation from the Unionist Party that the strike leaders "were in league with the Provisional IRA to create a socialist republic."[81]

Ulster says no

Edward Carson once remarked that if divisions inside Unionism "became wide and deep, Ulster would fall." This wasn't lost on Unionist leaders themselves, and intermittent efforts have been made to restore the all-class alliance under the banner of Unionist unity. The zenith of these unity initiatives came in 1985–86. Margaret Thatcher and Garret Fitzgerald had enraged Unionists by signing the Anglo-Irish Agreement, which granted the Irish government a largely symbolic consultative role in Northern Irish affairs. This concentrated the minds of Unionist leaders, with Paisley and UUP Leader Jim Molyneux forming a "Unionist pact." A campaign was begun involving the boycott of local council business, illegal parades, and resignations from Westminster seats. It would culminate in the "Ulster Says No!" rally at Belfast City Hall—a massive demonstration that undoubtedly had an all-class character and composition: "Civil servants and their smartly dressed wives, tweed-caped farmers and venerable sash-wearing Orangemen mixed with the 'boot boys'…the pinched-faced men and women of the Belfast ghettos."[82]

The campaign also involved a one-day general strike, organised by the 1986 workers committee (largely made up of the UVF and the UDA), which "shut down most industry and commerce in Northern Ireland," with most workers staying at home to avoid paramilitary roadblocks.[83] The action replicated the pattern of widespread intimidation from the UWC strike but was largely symbolic and nowhere near as sustained as in 1974. This was unquestionably the result of deep class tensions in the movement—with the more bourgeois Unionists unwilling to repeat the economic disruption of the UWC strike. A campaign by Loyalist paramilitaries to attack the homes of RUC officers—resulting in at least 500 assaults—also spooked more moderate elements. If the UWC strike wasn't the Ulster Covenant, then 1986 wasn't 1974 either.

This was spectacularly demonstrated by Paisley's efforts to recreate the UVF of 1912. In 1986, Paisley donned a military beret to announce the arrival of a "third force" in the North—if Margaret Thatcher wouldn't listen to thousands of people protesting, he reasoned, then maybe she would take heed "if the 300,000 had guns in their hands."[84] Paisley and his supporters created the Ulster Resistance Movement—a paramilitary organisation conceptualised as a repeat of the 1912-era UVF, but which came nowhere close to matching its strength or success. The new group managed to acquire an impressive arsenal, mainly through contacts with the South African apartheid regime. It recruited a few thousand members too. But

it had minimal support from the "respectable classes" that had thrown their weight behind the original UVF, and nothing close to the 100,000 members it claimed. Over the next few years the DUP would quietly distance itself from the Ulster Resistance Movement, with most of its weaponry falling into the hands of the UDA and the UVF.

The resurrection of the all-class alliance came apart, therefore, without being able to claim even a tenuous victory. Again, there were those in the DUP, like Gregory Campbell, who suggested Unionism should go it alone and form a "provisional government".[85] This was also the period when Loyalist paramilitaries flirted with the idea of Ulster independence. But as in 1974, this would have required a confrontation with a British government that was propping up the remnants of the Orange state. As Peter Robinson put it at the time: "We are on the window ledge of the Union. But I can tell you that this does not mean we will jump off."[86] As the reality of the decline of Orange power set in, sections of Unionism would engage in a rethink. Such a realisation inside the DUP was much slower, though it would eventually come.

The last stand

In 1998, the Belfast Agreement was signed, committing Unionism and nationalism to a new power-sharing arrangement. The DUP condemned the agreement as a sop to "terrorists," branding any Unionist who disagreed as irredeemable "lundies" and sell-outs. As ever, Paisley saw the hidden hand of conspiracy at work, writing in the *Revivalist* in 1998:

> This year will be a crisis year for our Province. The British Government in cahoots with Dublin, Washington, the Vatican and the IRA, are intent to destroy the province. The so-called talks process is but a front. Behind it the scene is set and the program in position to demolish the Province as the last bastion of Protestantism in Europe.[87]

The agreement was supported by an overwhelming majority of Northern voters—albeit with Protestant support only marginally over 50 per cent. Paisley was undeterred, declaring the result a victory and a vindication of his conviction that the Protestant population did not support power-sharing. Former SDLP deputy leader Seamus Mallon once described the agreement as "Sunningdale for slow learners"—a view Paisley no doubt concurred with. But this begs the question: given its staunch public opposition, why did the DUP not try and bring the agreement down in the manner that they had in 1974? Perhaps the obvious answer is that Paisley couldn't rely on paramilitary support—so critical to the success of the UWC action—since both the UDA and the UVF endorsed the agreement. This marked an important shift, but it raises a further question: even if the broad ranks of militant Loyalism could count on paramilitary support, could they have repeated the scale and strength of the UWC action in 1998?

As noted in Part One, the economic landscape of the North had been transformed by the mid-1990s as a result of the combined impact of deindustrialisation, the spread of foreign direct investment, and fair employment law's effect in severely undercutting the old "Orange capital". Had Loyalists enacted a general strike in 1998, what workplaces could they have reasonably expected to close? Or, to invert the class dynamic, what elements of the political, economic, and military establishments that had formed the leadership of Unionism at the time of partition would now back such a move?

Certainly, Loyalism was not completely sapped of any social weight. This was demonstrated in the early years of the Drumcree dispute when the RUC forced the Orange Order down the Garvaghy road, against the wishes of residents, after sustained Loyalist protest.[88] After the Belfast Agreement, however, the British government were extremely keen to win nationalist support for the new dispensation, and this acted as a counterweight to its susceptibility to bowing to Loyalist pressure. In 1998, Paisley declared the Drumcree dispute to be the "last stand"—with the Orange Order, the DUP, and the paramilitaries mobilising around 10,000 people to lay siege to the Garvaghy Road after the government denied access to its "traditional route". The declaration of a last stand resonated with many Loyalists, who conducted a Northern-wide campaign of violence resulting in 500 attacks on the police and army and some 2,500 public

order incidents. In north Antrim, the small nationalist village of Dunloy was blockaded by a thousand Loyalists.[89]

Could Loyalism repeat the success of the UWC strike by bringing the North to its knees? It certainly tried. In addition to the roadblocks and protests, rumours were rife that a strike of some kind was on the way—but nothing like the widespread economic disruption of the UWC strike ever materialised or was even attempted. Then catastrophe struck when the UVF murdered three young children—brothers Jason, Mark and Richard Quinn—in a firebomb attack on their home in Ballymoney. There was widespread revulsion at the killings, and they provided the impetus for the more "respectable" elements of Unionism to cut themselves loose from the dispute. The RUC chief constable placed the blame for the deaths on the Orange Order, while Church of Ireland primate Robin Eames called for the dispute to end.[90] Significantly, Unionist leader David Trimble—who had triumphantly celebrated previous Orange victories at Drumcree—called on Loyalists to "go home."[91] The last stand had ended in sordid, gruesome defeat.

The Drumcree dispute testified to the enduring capacity of Loyalism to wreak havoc. But it also demonstrated a significant weakening in the social weight of Orange power. The paradox is that the same process that undercut the power of Orangeism was simultaneously the driving force behind the rise of the DUP—with traditionalists blaming the Lundy David Trimble for Unionist declension, and hard-pressed working-class communities becoming fertile ground for Paisley's doomsday rhetoric. Trimble acknowledged the shift towards the DUP in deprived communities, but confidently predicted that the electoral weight of Protestant workers was "limited and declining" due to the displacement of an industrial proletariat with a new middle class—the "garden centre prods"—and bolstered by the fact that "turnout in working-class areas has always been lower than turnout in middle-class areas."[92]

Trimble's overestimation of the middle class was not unique: it represented a local variant of a new political sensibility emerging across Western politics, one which had clearly captured the enthusiasm of his advisers based in Queen's and Ulster universities. This wager on the new middle class spectacularly failed to pay off, however. By 2005, the only remaining Ulster Unionist MP was Sylvia Hermon—predictably elected in North Down, the wealthiest constituency in the North. By contrast, Paisley was impervious to the faddish manias of the academic elite: "The outliers. You have to take care of the outliers. This is the true Ulster Protestantism."[93]

Prophecy fulfilled

It was against this backdrop that Paisley began his long walk down the road to Damascus. For a period, the DUP were willing to patiently reap the electoral rewards. As Paisley put it: "We're going to keep our powder dry and give Trimble enough rope to hang himself."[94] Even after surpassing the UUP as the largest Unionist party, Paisley and the DUP continued with a wait-and-see approach: "I may be in the driving seat now but I don't necessarily have to drive. I can sit in that seat and give Tony Blair a poke in the ribs, but I don't need to come up with any formula or solutions."[95]

Ultimately, however, the DUP itself would be driven to cutting a deal with Sinn Féin. There were several critical factors at play in this. Firstly, the DUP was now attracting a broader base of support as the largest Unionist party. As Coulter notes, DUP support in the mid-1990s was largely comprised of those who felt "aggrieved by the direction of recent social and political changes within the six counties"—namely "small farmers, rural labourers, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers."[96] Its elevation as the leading party of Unionism, however, brought a change to the DUP's social composition. This "new DUP" was a party of the "respectable middle class," Paul Bew suggested, "alarmed by the prospects for investment if terrorists entered government."[97]

By the early 2000s, the DUP was developing support among sections of the Unionist establishment which had formerly shunned it. A number of important Ulster Unionists (Arlene Foster and Jeffrey Donaldson among them) defected to the party, and the Orange Order began to collaborate much more closely with the DUP, lifting its prohibition on Free Presbyterian

chaplains. Sections of the business community became less standoffish as well, attracted by the DUP's new proximity to power. As one DUP member explained: "The new DUP is not made for street politics. It's full of special advisers…The DUP dinner of today is an event to which guests are invited: businessmen, non-DUP voters, the whole ethos has changed, and that's all to make them appear as the party of government."[98]

The DUP was undergoing a subtle shift. Rather than outright opposition to power-sharing, they now declared they would cut a deal if Sinn Féin proved it was "fit for government". This required a period of "decontamination" that would involve IRA decommissioning and recognition of the PSNI. DUP MLA David Simpson, owner of the Universal Meat Company and one of a new crop of DUP politicians, expressed this shifting view: "Business people were saying to us on the door that the decontamination period has to be extended. They [Sinn Féin] know what they have to do and, if they do it, then come back and talk to us."

It is impossible to understand the DUP's agreement with Sinn Féin without situating it within the unique economic context of the period.[99] Though the Northern economy remained a regional backwater in the wider UK economy, and was rapidly outstripped by a roaring Celtic Tiger to its south, capitalism in the North was profiting from over a decade of economic growth—largely driven by rising property prices, a construction boom, and a growth in retail. This did not entirely eliminate the "festering sense of grievance" within Loyalism, as Tom Paulin once put it, but it did offer working-class people on both sides the hope of a brighter future.[100] Significantly, a 2007 poll showed that a majority of Protestants were optimistic for the future for the first time in a decade.[101] This explains why 58 per cent of DUP voters backed the St. Andrews Agreement—the deal that brought Sinn Féin and the DUP together—despite the fact it would result in a Sinn Féin deputy first minister.[102]

Less affluent voters had propelled the DUP to the head of Unionism, but working-class concerns rarely figured in its deliberations. Instead, the DUP was working towards reconstruction of the all-class alliance by reaching out to more middle-class elements. But why was entry into Stormont necessary for this task? In an era when Orange power was in decline, the entry into Stormont could conceivably help to arrest this development: communal patronage in the form of jobs, money, influence, and streams of funding would all come with a resurrection of the assembly. Indeed, the DUP were presented with an enticing example of the possibilities when they managed to negotiate the removal of real estate tax on Orange halls.[103] If they could achieve this on the outside, what might they reap from the inside—especially in the context of a booming economy?

Lastly, if Loyalism had a diminished—though lingering—capacity to enforce its will by extra-parliamentary measures, then the communal veto at the heart of the Belfast Agreement offered another route to Unionist obstructionism. As part of the St. Andrews Agreement, the DUP negotiated a strengthening of its veto over ministries, over and above the communal petition of concern already in place. This contextualises the observation made by Eamonn McCann that the timing of the DUP's entry into government was motivated by its desire to block progressive legislation over equal marriage and abortion access.[104]

The DUP's entry into government with Sinn Féin was an example of what Trimble called "the conditional nature of the sort of Unionism and loyalism that Paisley represents." There was evidence of this pragmatic malleability as far back as the early days of the DUP. Take the question of the EU, for example. When it was first formed, Paisley saw it as "a sign that the end of the world was fairly well nigh." Later, he asked: "What holds the Common Market together?" Answer: "Satanic power." These were strong words, even for a man not known for linguistic moderation. Nonetheless, his objections did not prevent Paisley from standing for election to the European Parliament, or from spending decades lobbying Brussels for funding and influence. His justification was as crude as it was pragmatic: "I'm going to get all I can for Ulster, every grant we can possibly get our hands on. Then, when we have milked the cow dry, we are going to shoot [it]."[105] Paisley's epigones would indeed bring the cow to slaughter by supporting Brexit some

decades later. The last of Paisley's self-fulfilling prophecies, perhaps? As Tom Paulin reminds us, "Puritan metaphor is a form of irony which has a habit of becoming literal."[106]

---

[1] See O'Neill's recollection of this in Terence O'Neill, *The Autobiography of Terence O'Neill*, 1972, p128.

[2] D. Taylor, *The Lord's Battle: An Ethnographic and Social Study of Paisleyism in Northern Ireland*, 1983, p34.

[3] Quoted in Terence Brown, *The Whole Protestant Community: The Making of a Historical Myth*, 1985, p17.

[4] Appropriated from the title of the concluding chapter of Ed Moloney, *Paisley: From Demagogue to Democrat*, 2008.

[5] Quoted in Paul Bew, "The problem of Irish Unionism", *Economy and Society*, Volume 6, 1977, p89.

[6]Steve Bruce, *Paisley: Religion and Politics in Northern Ireland*, 2007, ii

[7]Brian Faulkner (John Houston, ed.), *Memoirs of a Statesman*, 1978, p39.

[8]*Belfast Telegraph*, 12 July 1966.

[9] Bruce, 2007, ix.

[10] Moloney, 2008, xiii.

[11]Ibid. p222.

[12] Ibid., p15,

[13] The origins of the Mission Church lie in a split that took place within the Ravenhill Presbyterian Church ten years earlier, when conservative members objected that some of the girls in the choir wore their hair short. See Richard Lawrence Jordan, *The Second Coming of Paisley: Militant fundamentalism and Ulster politics in a transatlantic context*, 2008, p124.

[14]Steve Bruce, *God Save Ulster: The Religion and Politics of Paisleyism*, 1989, p35.

[15] See Jordan, 2008, pp126–31.

[16] The idea of a singular and undifferentiated Protestant community is, as Terence Brown remarks, a "historical myth": "The northern protestant community has recurrently been riven by contentious disputes, oppositions of class and creed, and theological schisms to a degree which is remarkable, given the almost total contemporary silence on the matter." Brown, 1985, p10

[17] Bruce, 1989, p32.

[18]Ibid., p33.

[19]Ibid.,pp269–70.

[20] Norman Porter, *Rethinking Unionism: An Alternative Vision for Northern Ireland*, 1996, p88.

[21]Patrick Marrinan, *Paisley: Man of Wrath*, 1973, p65.

[22] Paisley would also often speak on the platforms of the small Independent Orange Order (IOO), though he was not a member. Eric P. Kaufmann, *The Orange Order: A Contemporary Northern Irish History*, 2007, p322. On the origins of the IOO in an intense period of class conflict in the early twentieth century, see John Gray, *City in Revolt: James Larkin and the Belfast Dock Strike of 1907*, 1985.

[23]Marrinan, 1973, p21.

[24]Ibid., p22.

[25] Paisley once said of Catholics that "they breed like rabbits and multiply like vermin."

[26] Connal Parr has produced some important work highlighting this underappreciated tradition of Protestant radicalism. See, for example, "Expelled from Yard and Tribe: The 'Rotten Prods' of 1920 and Their Political Legacies", *Studi irlandesi. A Journal of Irish Studies*, 11, 2021, pp299–321.

[27] Paul Blanshard, *The Irish and Catholic Power*, 1953, p234.

[28] Moloney, 2008, p20

[29]Ibid., p27.
[30] Bruce, 1989, p56.
[31] Marrinan, 1973, p44.
[32] For an account of the outdoor relief riots see Seán Mitchell, *Struggle or Starve: Working-Class Unity in Belfast's 1932 Outdoor Relief Riots*, 2017. For more information on the UPL see Graham Walker, "'Protestantism Before Party!': The Ulster Protestant League in the 1930s",*The Historical Journal*, Volume 28, Issue 4, 1985.
[33] Moloney, 2008, p24.
[34] Bruce, 1989, p68.
[35]Marrinan, 1973, p129.
[36] Moloney, 2008, p51.
[37] Ibid. p119.
[38]On Paisley's relationship with the Bob Jones University, see Jordan, 2008.
[39]Marrinan, 1973, p142.
[40] Brian Kelly, *Transatlantic Affinities: King, Non-Violent Civil Disobedience and the Failure of Civil Rights Agitation in Northern Ireland* (unpublished paper), pp10–11.
[41] Moloney, 2008, pp191–2.
[42] Letter marked secret from A.H. Kennedy, Inspector General, RUC Headquarters Belfast, to J.E. Greeves, Ministry of Home Affairs (22 June 1966). PRONI. CAB9B/300/1.
[43] See Mike Milotte, *Communism in Modern Ireland: The Pursuit of the Workers' Republic since 1916*, 1984.
[44] Roy Garland, *Gusty Spence*, 2001, p56.
[45] Milotte, 1984, p230.
[46]Ibid., p261.
[47]Ibid., p262.
[48] Marrinan, 1973, pp110–1.
[49] Moloney, 2008, p117.
[50] Milotte, 1984, p262.
[51] Moloney, 2008, p143.
[52]Marrinan, 1973, p22.
[53] Moloney, 2008, p170.
[54] Faulkner, 1978, p88.
[55]Ibid., p43.
[56]Memoirs from civil rights leaders include Eamonn McCann, *War and Irish Town*, 1976; Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul*, 1969; Paul Arthur, *The Peoples' Democracy, 1968-1973,* 1974. A more source-based account can be found in Bob Purdie's *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement*, 1990. Matt Collins' unpublished PhD is invaluable too. Matt Collins, *The History of the People's Democracy: Civil rights, socialism, and the struggle against the Northern state, 1968-1983*, 2018.
[57] See Dan Finn, "The Point of No return? The People's Democracy and the Burntollet march", *Field Day Review*, 2013. Matt Collins, "Burntollet: How the establishment whitewashed the Civil Rights Movement", *Rebel* (5 October 2018).
[58] One of the key leaders of the 1969 pogroms was the fanatically anti-Catholic John McKeague, who Paisley worked closely with. See Michael McCann's proudly partisan account, *Burnt Out – How the Troubles Began.* See also Max Hastings, *Ulster 1969: The Fight for Civil Rights in Northern Ireland*, 1970.
[59] O'Neill, 1972, p80.

[60] Stormont, Hansard, House of Commons (15 June 1966), p338.
[61] Milotte, 1984, p262.
[62] Moloney, 2008, p103.
[63] Neil Davidson, "Right-Wing Social Movements: The Political Indeterminacy of Mass Mobilisation", in Colin Barker, Laurence Cox, John Krinsky, and Alf Gunvald Nilsen (eds), *Marxism and Social Movements*, 2013.
[64] Dennis Cooke, *Persecuting Zeal: A Portrait of Ian Paisley*, 1996, p192.
[65] Marrinan, 1973, p114.
[66] Matt Collins has produced a series of well-measured articles on the origins of the Troubles. Matt Collins, "1968: The year the North exploded", in *Irish Marxist Review*, Volume 7, No 22, 2019, pp29–43. Matt Collins, "1969 & the Birth of the Troubles", in *Rebel*, 2019, available online at: http://www.rebelnews.ie/2019/08/14/1969-and-the-birth-of-the-troubles ; and Matt Collins, *Internment: 50 Years On*, 2021.
[67] Moloney, 2008, p231.
[68]Ibid., p 244.
[69] For a journalistic account of the UWC strike see Robert Fisk, *Point of No Return: the Strike which Broke the British in Ulster*, 1975.
[70] Mike Miller, "Belfast on Strike", in *International Socialism*, No 70 (Mid-June 1974), pp17–21.
[71] Faulkner, 1978, p261.
[72] Bruce, 1989, p109.
[73]Faulkner, 1978, p263.
[74]Ibid., p262.
[75]Ibid.,p269.
[76]Ibid., p264.
[77] People's Democracy, for example, set up its own armed wing in preparation for this "fascist takeover." See Collins, 2018, pp346–36.
[78] Michael Farrell, *Northern Ireland: The Orange State*, 1976, p331.
[79] Alan O'Day, *Political Violence in Northern Ireland,* 1997, p72.
[80] Faulkner, 1978, p263.
[81] Bruce, 1988, p114.
[82] Moloney, 2008, p292.
[83] Bruce, 2007, p111.
[84]*Belfast Telegraph* (18 November 1986).
[85] Bruce, 2007, p230.
[86]Ibid., p110
[87] Moloney, 2008, p492.
[88] For a journalistic account of the Drumcree dispute see Chris Ryder and Vincent Kearney, *Drumcree: The Orange Order's Last Stand*, 2002. Some useful information on can also be found in Dominic Bryan, *Orange Parades: The Politics of Ritual, Tradition and Control*, 2000.
[89] Kaufmann, 2007, p198.
[90] Ibid.
[91]*Irish Times* (13 July 1998).
[92] Frank Millar, *David Trimble: The Price of Peace*, 2004, pp160–1.
[93]Moloney, 2008, p125.

[94]Ibid., p119.

[95]*Sunday Telegraph* (30 November 2003).

[96] Colin Coulter, *Contemporary Northern Irish Society: An Introduction,* 1999, p91–2.

[97]Paul Bew, "Trimble has delivered but DUP changes stance to counter him", *Irish Times* (8 June 1998).

[98]Quoted in Moloney, 2008, pp510–1.

[99] Brian Kelly, "Neoliberal Belfast: Disaster Ahead?", *Irish Marxists Review*, Volume 1, No 2, 2012, pp47–8. Seán Mitchell, "The Permanent Crisis of 21st Century Ulster Unionism", *Irish Marxist Review*, Volume 3, No 9, 2014, pp27–42.

[100] Quote from Tom Paulin, *Writing to the Moment: Selected Critical Essays, 1980-95*, 1996, p78.

[101] Millward Brown Omnibus Survey, 2007.

[102]*Belfast Telegraph* (9 August 2007).

[103]*Irish News* (16 January 2005).

[104] Eamonn McCann, "Real Reason Ian Paisley Decided to Strike Deal with Sinn Féin", *Belfast Telegraph* (April 12 2013). O'Leary accuses McCann of reducing Paisley's change of heart to a "religious explanation." This seems a stretch to me, even if McCann's point wasn't the entire story—better a valid insight than an incorrect theory. Brendan O'Leary, *A Treatise on Northern Ireland – Volume 3: Consociation and Confederation*, 2019 p381.

[105] Quoted in John D. Brewer with Gareth I. Higgins, *Anti-Catholicism in Northern Ireland, 1600-1999*, 1998 p108.

[106] Paulin, 1996, p36.