Northern Ireland 1921-2016

Dr Gordon Gillespie
July 2016
General Terms

- **Unionist** – someone who supports the Union of Northern Ireland with Great Britain
  - Or - belonging to political mainstream of those who support the Union – traditionally represented by the Ulster Unionist Party
- **Loyalist** – more hard-line element of unionism. Often seen as more working class, inward looking and more prepared to use violence.
- PUL community – Protestant, Unionist, Loyalist

- **Nationalist** – someone who supports the creation of an all-Ireland state
  - Constitutional nationalism the mainstream – not prepared to use violence to achieve that objective. Largely represented by the Social Democratic and Labour Party during The Troubles
- **Republican** – wants an all-Ireland Republic. Often viewed as more working-class. Can be prepared to use violence to achieve objectives.
- CNR community – Catholic, Nationalist, Republican.
The Situation at Partition

- Government of Ireland Act 1920

- Creates new regional parliament and government in the Northern six counties (the only devolved govt in UK) based at **Stormont** from 1932

- Unionist leaders distrust British govt - But need British financial and military support (IRA attacks continue until 1922)

- Build up their own security forces: the Royal Ulster Constabulary and Ulster Special Constabulary

- 1925 Boundary Commission recommends only minor changes to the border

- Ulster Unionist Party the dominant political party for 50 years
Challenges to the Unionist Government

- Ulster Unionist Party government:
  - Prioritised security and unionist unity
  - Made easier by British desire to forget about Ireland –
  - House of Commons Speaker’s Ruling 1923 – UK Parliament does not intervene in devolved matters

- NI PM James Craig’s failure on Catholics -
  - February 1921: ‘The rights of the minority must be sacred to the majority.’
  - But 12 July 1932: ‘Ours is a Protestant Parliament and I am an Orangeman’

- Inflated sense of self-importance? –
  - Parliament Buildings opened 1932
Nationalist Opposition

- Distrust, fear and resentment
- Impact of the expulsions and sectarian murders of Catholics 1920-22
- Initially \textbf{refused to recognise the state}
- Looked to Dublin for leadership
- Hoped the Boundary Commission would make North unviable – it recommended only minor changes
- But Nationalist opposition in Northern Ireland ineffective and often withdrew from NI Parliament
- Intermittent violence from the IRA

Joe Devlin
Nationalist leader
Post-War NI – Threats to Unionist Dominance

- Devolution intended to be self-financing but:
- Decline in heavy industry and textiles
- Shortfall in taxes raised locally compared to cost of running services made up by ‘subvention’ from UK treasury.
- Increasing scale of government due to (UK-wide) Welfare State, etc after 1945
- Increase in Northern Ireland Labour Party vote worries Ulster Unionist Party
- Nationalist Anti-Partition campaign of late 1940s and early 1950s unsuccessful
- Unionists unsettled by Irish Republican Army’s Border Campaign of 1956-62 – made them less likely to support reform

Sir Basil Brooke
NI PM 1943-63
Discrimination

- Areas of discrimination against Catholics/Nationalists:
  - Electoral practices – gerrymandering (and associated loss of resources)
  - Public employment – Catholics under-represented in civil service
  - Policing – Catholics under-represented in RUC, B Specials wholly Protestant, Special Powers Act – used mainly against nationalists and republicans (e.g. marches, display of flags)
  - Private employment – Unionist government ignored or supported discrimination against Catholics
  - Public housing – discrimination in allocation by some councils
  - Regional policy – more Catholic west did not get fair share of resources (e.g. University of Ulster located in Coleraine - not in Derry)
What Motivated Discrimination?

- Fear of incorporation into a Gaelic, Catholic Irish state
- Decline of Protestant population in South: Church of Ireland population dropped 34% 1911-1926 and a further 36% by 1961
- Southern Irish continuing claim on NI – eg Articles 2 and 3 of Irish Constitution
- Continuing IRA violence (including 1956-62 Border campaign - 6 police officers and 11 IRA men killed)
- Catholic/nationalist rejection of state within NI
- Internal Unionist pressure – more government resources for unionist supporters, security fears of border Protestants
- Fear of Unionist political splits by UUP
- Sectarianism
The O’Neill Years: 1963-69

- Terence O’Neill NI PM in 1963. Objectives:
  - **Economic reform**
  - Win back votes from the NI Labour Party
  - Improve Protestant/Catholic relations
  - Improve North/South relations
  - Appease Labour government at Westminster
  - BUT -
  - Opposition from *within* the Unionist Party
  - 1966 anniversaries heighten tension
  - 1966 emergence of **Ulster Volunteer Force**
  - 1966 Gerry Fitt (Republican Labour) wins West Belfast seat
  - Growing demands for end to discrimination
  - Greater interest from UK Labour govt after 1966
NICRA formed 1967

- Growing demand for end to discrimination from (mostly Catholic) groups from early 1960s

- **1967 NI Civil Rights Association** demands:
  - One man, one vote for council elections
  - The ending of gerrymandered electoral boundaries
  - The creation of official offices to prevent discrimination by public authorities and to deal with complaints
  - Fair allocation of public housing
  - The repeal of the Special Powers Act
  - The disbanding of the B Specials

- Many unionists viewed NICRA as a communist/republican front aimed at destroying Northern Ireland

24 August 1968
Coalisland to Dungannon
March by NICRA
Increasing NICRA activity

- June 1968 Caledon, Co.Tyrone sit-in protest against allocation of a house to a single Protestant woman employed by a unionist councillor ahead of Catholic families.

- 24 August 1968 First civil rights march – Coalisland-Dungannon Co.Tyrone – but had nationalist undertones. Meets counter-demonstration of Ian Paisley supporters in Dungannon.

- 5 October 1968 RTE television coverage of NICRA march in Derry brings NI to the attention of the world and conveys the impression of a repressive, brutal regime.
Unionist Reform Package

- November 1968 the NI government issues reform plan:
  - A new system for the allocation of houses by local authorities
  - Ombudsman to be appointed to investigate complaints against govt departments
  - A Development Commission to take over the powers of Londonderry Corporation
  - Special Powers Act to be repealed as soon as it is safe to do so
  - Company vote abolished for local govt elections
  - BUT Universal franchise for local govt elections NOT conceded due to internal unionist disputes

- April 1969 NI government accepts universal vote for local govt
- October 1969 NI govt accepts abolition of the B Specials

- Well received by nationalists but overtaken by events within months
People’s Democracy March

- **People’s Democracy** – a radical left wing students’ group emerges late 1968 aiming to undermine the state

- Organises protest march January 1969

- Intended to be based on the Montgomery-Selma Civil Rights march in the USA. Unionists saw it as a coat-trailing exercise by republicans and Marxists.

- Attacked by loyalists - including off-duty B Specials at **Burntollet** outside Derry

- Burntollet led to a massive deterioration in relations between nationalists and unionists

- February 1969 O’Neill calls NI General Election but fails to win overwhelming majority – resigns as Prime Minister
August 1969

- Trouble around Orange 12 July parades contained by police
- 12 August 1969 ‘Battle of the Bogside’ follows Apprentice Boys of Derry march
- Rioting in Derry spreads to Belfast and leads to sectarian conflict
- Irish Taoiseach Jack Lynch calls for United Nations soldiers to used as peacekeepers - sends Irish Army field hospitals to the border
- **British Troops** called in to patrol streets - Derry 14 August and Belfast 15 August
- ‘No-go areas’ set up in republican areas
New Political Parties and Paramilitary Groups

- **Political Parties:**
  - Middle ground Alliance Party - April 1970
  - Constitutional nationalist party the Social Democratic and Labour Party - August 1970
  - Democratic Unionist Party led by Ian Paisley - September 1971

- **Paramilitary Groups:**
  - Provisional IRA / Official IRA split August 1969
  - Ulster Defence Association – local loyalist vigilante groups coalesce in September 1971
Internment

- March 1971 O’Neill’s replacement James Chichester-Clark resigns after failing to get British government to agree tougher security policy. Succeeded by Brian Faulkner

- August Faulkner convinces the British government to support **internment** without trial - with disastrous consequences

- 9 August 1971 - army arrests 342
  - No loyalists interned
  - 11 men subject to ‘interrogation in depth’

- Violence escalates to highest levels of the Troubles.
Bloody Sunday: 30 January 1972

- **Bloody Sunday** 14 men killed by British soldiers in Derry following an anti-internment march
- British government receives international criticism and considers direct rule
- Increases support for the IRA within the Catholic community

IRA bombing campaign continues:
- July 1972 IRA leader Martin McGuinness says: 'We are prepared to bomb any building that will cause economic devastation and put pressure on the [UK] Government.' The IRA will bomb businesses, 'whenever we feel like it.' The bombing of the commercial centre of Derry was part of a programme which was now 'practically complete.' (News Letter 18 July 1972).
Direct Rule

- March 1972 Direct Rule of NI by British government ministers introduced.
- The Northern Ireland Office is created as a Department of UK Government headed by a Secretary of State – a member of the UK Cabinet.
- British Government aims to create a ‘Power-sharing Executive’ involving unionists and nationalists. BUT little support for this in Northern Ireland or the Republic.
- British also mention the ‘Irish Dimension’ – some type of formalised political relationship between Northern Ireland and the Republic.
- Irish Dimension supported by nationalists but strongly opposed by unionists

William Whitelaw
First NI SoS
### Annual Deaths due to the Troubles

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Power-Sharing MK1: Sunningdale

- November 1973 Whitelaw chairs talks between the UUP, Alliance and SDLP aimed at forming a Power-sharing Executive for NI
- November Executive (led by Brian Faulkner) agreed in principle – to consist of 6 unionist, 4 SDLP, 1 Alliance

**Sunningdale Conference** 6-9 December 1973 on Irish Dimension. British Govt, Irish Govt, NI Executive parties discuss Constitutional status of NI, extradition from the republic, a Council of Ireland

- Anti-Sunningdale unionists (reflecting the majority of unionist opinion) coalesce round opposition to Council of Ireland
- May 1974 loyalist politicians, paramilitaries and workers call the Ulster Workers’ Council Strike. Brings NI economy to a halt and exposes lack of unionist support for Sunningdale. Unionists resign from the executive.
Prisoners

- British policy - 'criminalisation' of paramilitary campaigns and remove special category status

- Republican campaign for political status gradually growing in the late 1970s as government seeks to phase out special category status

- Republicans reply with blanket protest, dirty/no wash protest and then hunger strike

- Republican prisoners’ campaign centres round winning demands which would see them given status along lines of prisoners of war
Hunger Strikes 1980-81

- 1980 a hunger strike called off because republicans (wrongly) believed they had achieved their goals

- Another hunger strike begins 1 March 1981

- April 1981 IRA prisoner **Bobby Sands** wins Fermanagh-South Tyrone by-election
- Raises profile of Hunger strike on which 10 prisoners, including Sands, die
- Ends in October with some concessions by Govt.
- Throughout this period nearly 80 people killed
- South Belfast MP Robert Bradford killed by the IRA in November

- **Sinn Fein/republican movement** consider contesting more elections (although not taking seats) BUT IRA campaign continues ‘Ballot Box and Armalite’ strategy
The Anglo-Irish Agreement: 15 November 1985

- 15 November 1985 the British and Irish Governments sign the **Anglo-Irish Agreement**
- Gives Irish government a right to be **consulted** on certain NI affairs.
- Nationalists see it as approaching joint British-Irish authority over NI
- British government expects improved security co-operation from the Republic but increasingly disillusioned over this
- Unionists not consulted and completely opposed to AIA
The Enniskillen Bomb: 8 November 1987

- In 1986 **Libya** again begin supplying the IRA with weapons
- 1 November 1987 150 tons of Libyan weapons for the IRA intercepted but an estimated 240 tons (including Semtex explosives) already smuggled into Ireland
- Gave the IRA the ability to continue their campaign for years
- 8 November 1987 an IRA bomb at **Poppy Day** ceremony killed 11 and injured 63
- The attack loses republicans support both in Ireland and around the world
The Peace Process

- Republican leaders moving to a more political approach
- **John Hume-Gerry Adams talks** intermittently from 1988
- Under Hume-Adams proposals of September 1993 British to be *persuaders* for a united Ireland

- November 1990 NI SoS Peter Brooke says Britain has no selfish, strategic or economic interest in NI and would not stand in way of a united Ireland if it was achieved by peaceful means.

- **Brooke-Mayhew Talks**: April 1991-November 1992
  - Three Strand Approach
  - Strand 1 Northern Ireland structures
  - Strand 2 North-South relations
  - Strand 3 East-West British-Irish relations
  - Brooke-Mayhew talks bring NI parties, British and Irish governments close to agreement on political structures.
  - Rejected by Hume who believes IRA ceasefire needed first.
The Downing Street Declaration

15 December 1993 British and Irish Governments sign the Downing Street Declaration

British government: ‘It is for the people of Ireland alone, by agreement between the two parts, to exercise their right of self-determination on the basis of consent, freely and concurrently given, North and South, to bring about a united Ireland, if that is their wish.’

Irish government: ‘the democratic right of self-determination by the people of Ireland as a whole must be achieved and exercised with and subject to the agreement and consent of a majority of the people of Northern Ireland.’

PM John Major and Taoiseach Albert Reynolds announce the Downing Street Declaration
Ceasefires

- IRA announces cessation of military operations on 31 August and loyalist CLMC on 13 October
- Doubts remain as to the limits of the ceasefires

- IRA ceasefire partly based on a policy of – Tactical Use of the Armed Struggle
- Aim to form a broad pro-republican front with the Irish Government, the SDLP and Irish-American lobby to pressurise the British government to withdraw from NI

- Loyalist CLMC ceasefire based on the belief no secret deal done by British or Irish Govts with republicans and that ‘the Union is safe’
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Ongoing problems

- Disputes surrounding Orange parades culminate in standoff at **Drumcree** Co. Armagh in July 1995.

- **President Clinton** visits NI November 1995 boosts the peace process - but the IRA is already planning another attack.

- Republicans demand immediate talks - rejected by unionists and British govt as no IRA movement on weapons.

- Senator George Mitchell produces report - decommissioning of paramilitary weapons **during** talks.

- British government supports idea for an elected body to run alongside negotiations - nationalists and republicans see this as stalling.

- February 1996 IRA ends ceasefire hoping to use violence to put talks along lines that it wants.

- IRA bombs kill two in London. 200 injured in Manchester.
Talks

- **After Labour victory** in UK General Election in May 1997 the government reduces demands for immediate handing over of arms.
- July 1997 IRA declares a new ceasefire
- Republicans brought into the talks but at the cost of a substantial minority of unionist representation (including DUP) leaving
The Good Friday Agreement

- Prolonged talks lead to the **Good Friday Agreement** in April 1998. Includes:
  - Power-sharing executive in NI
  - North-South Ministerial Council
  - Council of the Isles (all British Isles elected bodies represented)
  - UK and Ireland govts make constitutional changes – most importantly Articles 2 and 3 to be aspirational

- Paramilitary prisoners released within two years
- Political parties to use **best efforts** to see decommissioning of weapons within two years

- Referenda in NI and the republic produce votes in favour of the Agreement but only about 55 per cent of Protestants vote in favour.
- In 1998 Assembly nearly half unionists elected oppose the Agreement
Changing Political Support

- 2001 SF overtake SDLP as largest nationalist party
- 2003 DUP overtakes UUP as biggest unionist party

Narrowing in practical approach of SF/SDLP as well as UUP/DUP to the GFA – all working within the general parameters of the Agreement

Issue becomes one of ‘ethnic outbidding’ – which party can get the best deal for their ethno-political bloc

After 2003 British (and Irish) govt place emphasis on getting a deal between DUP and SF

Move away from the inclusive approach of the GFA
Continuing Instability – Slow Progress

- August 1998 republican dissident bomb in Omagh kills 28 injures 360
- Unionist-nationalist disputes over decommissioning lead to political instability
- October 2001 IRA begins to put weapons ‘beyond use’ after pressure from USA post 9/11
- July 2005 IRA announces end to armed campaign
- October 2006 St Andrews Agreement – DUP would join SF in NI Executive if SF supports the police
- May 2007 NI Executive formed with DUP and SF as largest parties
- July 2007 Army operation in NI officially ends
- April 2010 Justice and Policing powers devolved to NI the Assembly
The End of the Troubles?

- Political settlement relatively stable (if inefficient?)

- But:
  - Elements of society still alienated – Republican dissident groups and working class Protestant communities
  - General public not enthusiastic about the Assembly
  - Outstanding areas of contention – interpreting and dealing with the past - victims
  - Issues involving symbolism – parades and flags
  - Economic problems continue
  - ‘Peace Dividend’ largely failed to appear
  - Economic austerity after 2008 due to world recession