

Conversations in Ulster

by
Norman Frankel

During May 1981, I interviewed representatives of the four main political parties, a respected news commentator, a well-known Catholic civil rights worker, and the leader of the Ulster Defense Association. Among the topics we discussed were: the performance of the Union, beliefs held by Eire politicians concerning the status of Northern Ireland, devolution of power vs. direct rule, Republican superiority in the art of propaganda, the role of the news media in the conflict, Ian Paisley and the DUP, and the extent of existing support for the IRA and terrorism. I have grouped their responses around these key issues. The following paragraphs represent their comments and thoughts on these political issues which are of vital concern to the citizens of Northern Ireland.

The Permanence of the Union

Jeremy Burchill (OUP)

Mr. Jeremy Burchill of the Official Unionist Party (OUP) is 31 years old. He is a Belfast City Councilor from Area A, and a barrister by profession. He is a frequent speaker for the Party in Northern Ireland and Great Britain. He was interviewed on May 5, 1981.

There is one unalterable fact: Ulster is part of the United Kingdom. When Eire recognizes this as fact, normal relations between Eire and Ulster can develop. London politicians must respect the strong feelings of Ulstermen concerning the Union, and refrain from engaging in secret negotiations (such as the London summit) with Eire. Such meetings breed insecurity among the majority of Ulstermen who favor the Union, and there is always the possibility that if the Ulstermen are made to feel insecure, they will resort to violence. Ulster has made a significant contribution to the welfare of the United Kingdom (witness the support given to the British war effort during World War II), and its people expect to be treated accordingly.

James Allister (DUP)

Mr. James Allister of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is 29 years old, a barrister by profession, and legal advisor to the party. He also serves as press officer and personal assistant to Dr. Ian Paisley. He was interviewed on May 11, 1981.

Politics must be based on the ballot box. All elections have shown a large majority wishing to maintain the Union with Great Britain. Therefore as long as there is democracy in Ulster, it will remain a part of Great Britain. The IRA does not accept the verdict of the ballot box, and is trying to force a Republican solution through terrorism. British maneuvering should be suspect because

the Unionists—not the British—will have to pay the price of their mistakes. There is a fear that the British would like to pull out of Ulster, and would if they could find a face-saving way to do so. This breeds insecurity among the Protestant population. The idea of an independent Ulster is completely unrealistic. Independence is not economically feasible. However, the idea of independence may appeal to people who feel frustrated with the present system.

John Cushnahan (AP)

Mr. John Cushnahan is 34 years old and has served as General Secretary of the Alliance Party (AP) since 1974. He is also a Belfast City Councilor from Area H. He was interviewed on May 12, 1981.

Re-partition, as suggested by Connor Cruise O'Brien and others, is not possible. All parties must recognize that the borders between Eire and Ulster are permanent. According to statistics (which he did not cite), the overwhelming majority of Catholics go along with being part of the United Kingdom. Both Protestants and Catholics view British rule favorably. In reality most Catholics and Protestants trust the British. Often politicians do not really represent the public because they are more extreme than their constituents. The British are pragmatic. They would like to withdraw from Ulster if they could. However, there is a strong reason that makes withdrawal impossible, or at least highly unlikely. Withdrawal would be an admission that the IRA had won and that violence had succeeded. There are separatist groups in Wales and Scotland which would be encouraged to press their cases for independence. Therefore the price of British withdrawal would be civil war which would tear the entire United Kingdom apart.

Brid Rodgers (SDLP)

Ms. Brid Rodgers is 45 years old, and at the time I interviewed her, was serving as Acting General Secretary of the Social Democratic and Labor Party (SDLP). She has since been made General Secretary. She was interviewed on May 13, 1981.

There is absolutely no way the Catholics will support the present situation. They will never accept citizenship in Northern Ireland as a normal situation. Some way must be found to accommodate their aspirations. Whenever the Unionists have been in power the Catholics have been totally excluded. This has greatly contributed to the conflict. Things have gotten much worse since 1970 and the Protestants will have to change their attitude if the situation is to improve. It is the goal of the SDLP to encourage a situation where both Catholics and Protestants can trust each other. This is the prerequisite for the development of a normal political climate. It will take a while to build up this trust, however, the only alternative is continued bloodshed. After the Protestants are convinced that they have nothing to fear, then it will be possible to talk about some form of integration between Eire and Northern Ireland.

Andy Tyrrie (UDA)

Mr. Andy Tyrrie is 42 years old, and has been Commander of the Ulster Defense Association (UDA) since 1973. He was interviewed on May 6, 1981.

Ideally, the UDA would like to see total independence granted to Ulster. Catholics and Protestants should be able to live together in peace. Many neighborhoods are now totally segregated. This must change if Catholics and Protestants are to develop mutual trust. However, there does not appear to be any willingness to compromise on the part of most Catholics as they continue to insist on the unification of the island. The idea of a united Ireland is a romantic idea, something a majority of the citizens of Ulster have consistently opposed. Protestants would be able to coexist with the Catholics if the Catholics gave up the idea of a united Ireland. Before partition, the population of southern Ireland was 12% Protestant. They were driven north by the intolerance of their neighbors. Religion is used like a weapon. If everyone behaved according to the tenets of his religion, there would be no conflict and everyone could live together peacefully in an independent Ulster.

Father Dennis Faul (Anti-H Block Committee)

Father Dennis Faul is 50 years old, and one of the most active of the anti-H Block campaigners. During the hunger strikes he made regular visits to the strikers. He was interviewed on May 14, 1981.

The situation will not improve until the border (between Northern Ireland and Eire) is removed. Any other changes will only be surface changes. Some times may be more peaceful than others, but the underlying cause of violence will remain. Normal politics have never been allowed to develop. The situation is topsy-turvy. The state is evil because of its oppressive nature. Everything is based on sectarian issues. Protestants are much more sectarian than the Catholics. The Catholics have been pushed into their sectarian position. After Bobby Sands (one of the hunger strikers whose death received widespread media attention) the Catholics decided that the ballot box was useless. Sands was elected as an M.P. to the British Parliament, but the British still kept him in prison and mistreated him. It must be remembered that the partition of Ireland was never meant to be permanent. The entire island must eventually be united.

W. D. Flackes

W. D. Flackes is a widely respected news commentator on Northern Irish Affairs. He works for the BBC-Northern Ireland, and has been labeled by some "the Walter Cronkite of Northern Ireland." He was interviewed on May 12, 1981.

The conflict in Northern Ireland is deep and cannot be papered over. The two communities are irreconcilable. The best that can be hoped for is to keep the conflict at a low level. Things have not improved noticeably since the imposition of direct rule from London. The Catholics are better off economically, but this will not

effect their commitment to Republicanism. If the Catholics were given a voice in a power sharing arrangement, violence would still continue. Most local issues are subsumed in the Loyalist-Republican battle which is really the main issue. The Protestants would never go along with unification, regardless of what Eire did to alter its constitution. Actually talk about altering the constitution is irrelevant.

The idea of an independent Ulster is completely untenable. Unionists would oppose it as it negates the main plank of their platform, i.e., that Ulster is an integral part of the United Kingdom. Republicans would view it as a step in the direction of their goal which is a united Ireland. The NUPRG (New Ulster Political Research Group, the political arm of the UDA, now defunct) are aware of the fact that there is little support for independence and they do not stress it in their election campaign. They concentrate on economic issues.

Beliefs of Eire Politicians Concerning the Status of Northern Ireland

Jeremy Burchill (OUP)

Many Irish politicians, although they publicly favor unity, do not really want to incorporate Ulster into Eire. Of course to state this publicly would be heresy, and would ruin their political careers. The Eire politicians use Ulster to distract public opinion from domestic problems, of which there are many such as inflation. Eire currency is worth much less than British currency.

James Allister (DUP)

Eire politicians, even the most liberal, want a united Ireland. Those who say otherwise simply should not be believed. All the "initiatives" and attempts at the formation of an Anglo-Irish Council will break down over the fact that there is no middle ground between Unionism and Republicanism.

John Cushnahan (AP)

The government of Eire always claims to be interested in unification. The politicians must make this ritualistic statement of loyalty to Republicanism. However nothing they could do, including altering their constitution, could persuade the Protestants to go along with unification. Protestants believe that they would lose most of their political and religious rights. They have a reflexive reaction against unification and this will exist for at least 50 years. Most politicians in Eire are aware of the almost insurmountable hurdles to unification: 1) it would go against the wishes of a majority of the Protestants; 2) terrorism would be worse as the Protestants would field their counterpart to the IRA; 3) the economic costs would be high. Eire's economy is already weak and it is difficult to understand where the money to finance unification would come from.

Brid Rodgers (SDLP)

Most Eire politicians are committed to the eventual unification of the island. They are pledged to this publicly and personally. They believe this to be the pre-requisite to the development of a normal political situation.

Andy Tyrrie (UDA)

There is no question that the rulers in Dublin want the entire island united, under their rule. This has always been the official position of the Eire government.

Father Dennis Faul (Anti-H Block Committee)

They believe in a united Ireland.

W. D. Flackes

Many southern politicians do not really want unification. They must deal on two levels. They must say one thing in public while really meaning the opposite. They realize that the British pour large amounts of money into Northern Ireland. It is a net drain on their treasury. The Irish government would not be able to come up with the enormous amount of money necessary for a successful unification.

Devolution vs. Direct Rule

Jeremy Burchill (OUP)

The OUP believes in the complete devolution of power. All political parties should be allowed to compete, as long as they do not advocate the overthrow of the government. However, there can be no quota system as this would be undemocratic. In reality, there probably will not be immediate action on devolution but there should be as much local power as possible.

James Allister (DUP)

Devolution is essential but a quota system would be out of the question as it is undemocratic. Ulster should have more control over its affairs and this will only be made possible through devolution. In addition to the desire for devolution, there is a general dissatisfaction with the way the British are handling the Irish situation. Ulster has not gotten its rightful share of government support, nor has the government paid enough attention to the development of Ulster's resources. For example, oil drilling off the coast of Ulster should be pursued more vigorously. The British, however, do not want to find oil because this would tie Ulster even more closely with the British economy.

John Cushnahan (AP)

Devolution is essential if a mature political system is to develop. However, direct rule must remain in place until a workable form of devolution, acceptable to both communities, is devised. The AP hopes to bring the communities of Ulster together. Once a climate

of trust has been established a feasible form of devolution can be developed. Successful devolution will only come about after compromises have been made on both sides to alleviate each community's fears.

Brid Rodgers (DLP)

Since the imposition of direct rule from London the British have instituted such things as ombudsmen, equal opportunity boards, etc., that try to give some justice to the Catholic community. If it were completely up to the Protestants, these things would not exist. Therefore, a situation must not be allowed to develop where the Protestants have total control (as was the case before the imposition of direct rule). If devolution were to occur it would be essential to have built-in safeguards for the Catholic population.

Andy Tyrrie (UDA)

As I mentioned earlier, we favor total independence for Ulster. We would be for devolution since it would allow the people of Ulster more control over their affairs. We are against any type of quota system.

Father Dennis Faul (Anti-H Block Committee)

The question is irrelevant. A natural political situation will not develop until the entire island is united.

W. D. Flackes

Eventually there will be some form of devolution, however, the violence will still continue. Devolution will be very difficult since it would require a certain degree of consensus in the community if it is to succeed.

Republican Superiority in the Art of Propaganda

Jeremy Burchill (OUP)

There are many reasons to explain why the Republicans are more effective propagandists. When Irish Protestants immigrate, they tend to assimilate as fast as possible in their new homes. They shed their "Irishness" and do not stay together in communities. On the other hand, Irish Catholics generally congregate in the same area and try not to lose their "Irishness." They are generally very vocal on issues concerning Eire and Ulster (he cited the Irish communities of Chicago and Boston as examples). There will usually be politicians around who will cater to the Irish anti-British bias as do Edward Kennedy and Edward O'Neill. The Irish government is usually willing to encourage lobbying for the Republican cause and they strongly encourage their embassies in foreign countries to advance the cause of a united Ireland. On the other hand, according to the Government of Ireland Act (1920), Ulster can only concentrate on domestic affairs, leaving foreign policy to London. The British Foreign Office and its embassies abroad have many things to worry about and Ulster usually ends up as a low priority. Passive

acquiescence or passive support is usually as much as they offer on behalf of the Ulster viewpoint. Rarely do they take the initiative in representing the Ulster viewpoint.

James Allister (DUP)

The Protestants have a very poor propaganda apparatus. They have never given it much thought. They believe that their cause is so obviously right that there is no need to engage in extensive propaganda activities. They cannot match the web of connections that the Republicans have built up. (The reasons he gave were similar to those given by Jeremy Burchill.) An example of effective Republican propaganda is the attitude that has been spread about the British troops stationed in Ulster. They are in Ulster because they were requested; however, Republican propaganda has depicted them as an occupying army, and this is the way most outsiders view them.

John Cushnahan (AP)

The Unionists never paid much attention to propaganda because they thought they had a God-given right to govern. They have lately become aware of the effectiveness of a strong propaganda apparatus. Paisley is aware of its power, but he does not present a positive image to most people. The OUP still has to come to terms with the need for coherent propaganda.

Brid Rodgers (SDLP)

The Protestants assumed their cause to be right and it never occurred to them that propaganda was necessary. They thought the correctness of their position to be self-evident. The Republicans, on the other hand, have been fighting for many years to get their message across, and they are well aware of the necessity of a strong propaganda apparatus.

Andy Tyrrie (UDA)

The Republicans are used to trying to convince people of the correctness of their cause. The Unionists grew complacent. They thought their cause was so obviously correct that propaganda was not necessary. There is automatic sympathy on the part of many people for "anti-colonial" struggles. The Republicans have capitalized on this by portraying the existence of Ulster as a form of British colonialism.

Father Dennis Faul (Anti-H Block Committee)

Consistent discrimination over many centuries has been practiced by the British against the Catholics. Most people recognize this as the obvious truth. Thus the Catholics do not need propaganda. They only need to tell the truth. We try to publicize the abuses of Catholic civil rights whenever possible by having stories printed in the newspapers.

W. D. Flackes

Even though there are many Protestant Ulstermen in the United States, the Republican viewpoint prevails. There are a number of reasons why the Republicans are winning the propaganda war. The Irish tend to stay in close-knit communities (i.e. Boston) while the Ulstermen tend to blend in. Ulster immigrants make an effort to blend in. They try to shed their former identity and become completely immersed in their new one. Irish nationalism has more of a romantic appeal, and is given impetus by the large Irish communities scattered around the world. There is a traditional predisposition to favor Irish nationalism. In much of the world, it is viewed as a colonial struggle. There is anti-British feeling in many parts of the world and some people would support the Irish just because they are fighting the British. This type of reaction is similar to the anti-American or anti-Russian feeling in other parts of the world.

The Media and the Conflict

Jeremy Burchill (OUP)

The media have not been helpful in the conflict. They tend to concentrate their reporting on violent actions. It is hard for an outsider to form a realistic picture of life in Ulster if he has to rely on news reports. The fact that most people lead normal lives over here does not seem to be big news.

James Allister (DUP)

It is important to have a free press, but the media should expend more energy on presenting a balanced picture instead of taking Republican propaganda at face value. The news media often inflame the situation by their biased reporting. They concentrate on acts of violence. More effort should be spent in explaining that most people lead normal lives.

John Cushnahan (AP)

The local media have been very reasonable and objective in their coverage of the "troubles." International media have behaved irresponsibly. Many reporters act like vultures. This costs lives and creates support for terrorism. They make a point of accenting terrorism without showing the overall picture. This creates a distorted image of Ulster society. Most people lead normal lives. However, this would be hard to know since the only things generally reported are sensationalistic acts of violence. (The most pointed criticism was of American media, especially television.)

Brid Rodgers (SDLP)

The media may help to fan the conflagration, but they cannot be said to be its cause. They concentrate on violence which cannot be helpful. They should try to be more positive. American public opinion is extremely uninformed about what is happening in Northern Ireland. If more Americans would take the trouble to travel in Northern Ireland, they would be able to form a more enlightened opinion.

Andy Tyrrie (UDA)

The media has had much to do with fanning the fires of violence. They must bear much of the responsibility for creating the Bobby Sands mystique (Tyrrie refers to the hunger strike by certain IRA prisoners in Maze Prison which was in progress at the time). The funeral of Bobby Sands tomorrow will be covered by many foreign journalists. This could help to incite spectators to violence. The UDA has been incorrectly portrayed by the press. The UDA is really reasonable but this is certainly not the impression created by the press. The media consistently champion the Republican cause, rarely trying to present a balanced picture.

Father Dennis Faul (Anti-H Block Committee)

The media have generally tried to present an accurate picture of events in Northern Ireland. In many cases they have exposed British abuse of power. For example, it is almost impossible to bring a successful case against the police. A policeman or soldier's word is always taken over that of a Catholic prisoner. The Catholics have their guns "lifted" while the Protestants are allowed to keep theirs. Murderers of police and army personnel are pursued but the murderers of Catholics are pursued weakly, or not at all. The British turn children into informers. If they have a child in jail, they may tell him that he will be released but re-arrested regularly. This will ruin his life. The police may also threaten to tell the IRA that he is an informer. The police convince children to sign false statements that may be used against them in the future. I have made over 700 complaints in the past ten years. After the false charges are exposed, the police release the prisoner in question and simply pick up someone else. We try to have information concerning individual cases published in the *Irish Times* (Dublin). The publication of the facts of the case often helps to clear the person who was falsely arrested. Without the aid of the press it would be very difficult to expose these violations. Publicity is essential to expose the wrongs of the present system. If each wrongdoing on the part of the security forces were exposed and publicized, this might give them pause and relieve some of the pressure on the Catholic community. The argument that the media only inflames passions is usually used by people who wish to keep the oppression of the Catholics a secret.

W. D. Flackes

The conflict cannot be blamed on the media. The conflict exists and the only things the media do is to report. I put no credence in claims that television cameramen are paying children to stone army vehicles so that the resulting scenes can be used for good pictures. The people of Belfast are very good at rioting, but this has nothing to do with the media. There are other causes. It is a red herring to blame the media for the problems of society.

Dr. Ian Paisley and the DUP

Jeremy Burchill (OUP)

The DUP is geared to publicity rather than constructive solutions to problems. The OUP is the party of responsible Unionism. It always operated legally. Because there are so few local powers, it is hard to appear effective before the people. The DUP tries to compensate for this lack of power by ostentation. They lack a strong political base. Their politics appeal to a very limited spectrum, usually the less articulate sector of the community. There is a very strong cult of personality, built around Paisley. Paisley has never been able to work within an organization as a subordinate. He must always be the chief. The DUP program is based on condemnation rather than the advancement of positive solutions. DUP power has peaked. (This was subsequently disproven as the DUP increased its representation on the local councils. They nearly outpolled the OUP in the 20 May 1981 local council elections.)

John Cushnahan (AP)

There is always at least a 20% support level for Protestant extremists. This support varies, depending upon the degree to which the Protestant community feels threatened. Ian Paisley has greatly strengthened the Protestant extremist movement. Paisley is the most charismatic Protestant politician. The DUP would survive without him, but its support would greatly diminish. If a comparison were made between the OUP and the DUP, one would have to say that the OUP leadership is of a higher calibre. They are more responsible. The DUP pays too much attention to theatrics without thinking through the consequences of their actions.

Brid Rodgers (SDLP)

The DUP is built around Paisley. If he were to disappear, his party would be greatly weakened. However, he does articulate the feelings of a large segment of the Protestant community. If he were to disappear, others would take his place; perhaps the OUP would become more extreme. Paisley represents the less articulate segment of the Protestant community.

Andy Tyrrie (UDA)

Ian Paisley is a total opportunist and will do whatever he has to to advance his political career. Much of the DUP propaganda is aimed at glorifying Paisley. He is frightened to talk to me because he does not wish to be associated with the independence movement. When the chips are down Paisley will not be able to produce an army to defend Protestant interests. (This is debatable in light of Paisley's "third force" maneuvers.)

Father Dennis Faul (Anti-H Block Committee)

Paisley is a demagogue. He uses religion to spread hatred. He does what he can to stir up bad feelings against Catholics. The DUP is Paisley's vehicle for championing Protestant extremism.

W. D. Flackes

The DUP is an important political force. Paisley is responsible for 60-70% of its support. It appears to represent the less well educated Unionists, the "street loyalists." The OUP lost this support when they became too liberal and tried to appear as moderates. Paisley "beats the Orange drum" and will always appeal to the working class Unionists. He is outflanking the OUP. The DUP has never been in power so they are not aware of the need for some type of moderation (i.e. they were never responsible for governing Ulster, as were the OUP before local rule was suspended).

The IRA and Terrorism

Jeremy Burchill (OUP)

There is support for the IRA in the Catholic community, and they also receive support from Eire. Terrorism has always been part of the Republican arsenal. There is widespread support in the Catholic community. The election of Bobby Sands is indicative of this support. They use terrorism against members of their own community who do not support the "cause." Protestants do not resort to terrorism. They have taken action in situations where the IRA has resorted to terrorist acts against the Protestant community and the police and army appear powerless to protect them. The actions of the Protestants are in self defense.

James Allister (DUP)

Catholics generally support the IRA. The Roman Catholic Church has a tradition of supporting militant Republicanism. They do not distance themselves from the terrorists. The Catholics are manipulated by Catholic politicians, the IRA, and the Catholic Church. These groups use the Catholics to maintain their power. The Roman Catholic Church is good at publicly condemning terrorism but it is inconsistent because it allows terrorists to be buried by the Church. There were priests officiating at the funeral of Bobby Sands. Terrorists should be excommunicated. Suicide should be a mortal sin. One week before Bobby Sands died he was given the last rites of the Catholic Church. Terrorism is the greatest problem facing Ulster. There should be cooperation with Dublin to defeat the terrorists. It is impossible to extradite terrorists from Eire. Until there is cooperation from Eire regarding the problem of terrorism, normal relations will be impossible. The argument that unemployment, poor housing, etc, are the cause of terrorism is spurious. There are equal numbers of Protestants unemployed but they do not turn to terrorism. The terrorism of the Catholics is politically motivated and has very little to do with economic discontent.

John Cushnahan (AP)

The goal of a political settlement should be to isolate terrorism. Whatever settlement finally emerges, there will always be some terrorism. Catholic support for the IRA fluctuates depending on

how threatened they feel. Support for the IRA had declined since 1970. The people who live under the gun of the IRA see that they behave more like gangsters than freedom fighters. There has been a growth of trust in the police force and this has undermined the terrorists to some extent. Protestant terrorists are just as bad as the IRA, but Protestant terrorism is usually reactive.

Brid Rodgers (SDLP)

Only a very small part of the Catholic community is totally committed to the IRA, however, in any confrontation situation where the Catholics feel that they have their backs to the wall, their support for the IRA will increase. The IRA is one of the symptoms rather than the cause of the unjust political system that exists in Northern Ireland. Protestant terrorist groups must be condemned just as soundly as the IRA. In order to tackle any of the terrorist groups one must have a commitment to changing the unnatural political situation. The many years of British misrule combined with the continued mistreatment of Catholics will be a constant source of contention and a breeding ground for terrorism.

Andy Tyrrie (UDA)

The IRA is a terrorist organization whose aim is the overthrow of the political systems of Eire and Ulster, a take-over of the entire island, and the establishment of a 32 county "socialist republic." Haughey (Prime Minister of Eire) has just as much to fear as the Ulstermen. Despite his public pronouncements to the contrary, he is aware of this. Many ultra-left and other terrorist groups sympathize with the IRA. The Russian embassy in Dublin is obviously overmanned. Many of these diplomats are spies who try to stir up trouble in the British Isles. Whenever possible, they assist the IRA. There are proven links between the PLO and the IRA. Many explosives used by the IRA are supplied by the Russians and have Russian markings. The RUC (Royal Ulster Constabulary) has been too soft on the IRA. The IRA will keep pushing until something blows. The British should react like the Israelis and follow the terrorists wherever they go. The British cannot pursue the terrorists into Eire and the Eire government is less than fully cooperative.

The UDA, unlike the IRA, is legal because it never went on a purely military campaign. It is paramilitary. The UDA only fights defensively. Unlike the IRA, the UDA does not try to aggravate the conflict. It fights only when it has to. The UDA is the only group capable of defending the Protestant community. Last week an exercise was held in West Belfast. Two to three thousand men were moved into the area in a coordinated manner. It was completely legal and no weapons were carried. The exercise was conducted just to prove that this type of operation could be carried out successfully if need be.

A war situation presently exists in Northern Ireland. Therefore all political prisoners should have political status. This includes the members of the IRA. However, this applies only to political crimes.

Regular crimes should not be given a political veneer. One of the biggest mistakes of the British government was to treat the present situation as if it were a crime wave. It is not a crime wave, but an attempt by a minority to illegally undermine the legitimacy of the political system. All prisons that hold political prisoners should be run like military camps. The "compound system" is superior. When the men are released they are better able to fit into society. The same rules should apply to Catholics as to Protestants. If a man is fighting for what he believes in, then he should be treated as a political prisoner. However, since the government did away with the "compound system" they should not change back. This type of U-turn would make them appear irresolute.

Father Dennis Faul (Anti-H Block Committee)

Support for the IRA varies depending upon how much the Catholics feel threatened. The IRA are often viewed as protectors. Support for the IRA is also dependent upon how the prisoners are treated. For example, during the hunger strike, support increased because the prisoners were perceived by many in the Catholic community as being ill-treated. The IRA are thugs and gangsters. Their efforts at "law enforcement" are misguided, i.e., kneecapping, tarring and feathering of women, etc. However, the British and Protestant Loyalists practice terrorism. The British Army and the RUC regularly use terrorism against Catholics under the guise of the Prevention of Terrorism Act. The RUC regard their mission as keeping the Protestants on top. They resort to terrorism and any other device to accomplish this mission. They taunt the Catholics and will not even allow them to bury their dead without harrassment. They pull Catholics into court at every opportunity, even for minor traffic offenses. The police often provoke riots. The RUC does not seem to realize that good police work as well as the healthy functioning of the political system, is based on a consensus within the community. Otherwise there will be violence. The Gárda (Police Force of the Irish Republic) are an example of a good police force.

W. D. Flackes

Support for the IRA varies. It is highest in West Belfast (an area of Belfast with a large Catholic population) and other trouble spots. IRA support increases as Catholics feel more threatened. In certain situations the Catholics view the IRA as their only protector. Irish politicians realize that the IRA is just as much a threat to the south as to the north. In spite of the split between the Provisional and the Official wings, they both espouse some form of socialism as their ultimate goal. This would mean the replacement of the existing form of government in Dublin.

An additional question concerning the role of religion in the present conflict was asked of Father Faul. The succeeding paragraphs will summarize his responses.

Most Protestants do not go to church and Protestantism is a political fraud. Protestants are obsessed with divorce, sex, and abortion. They believe they should have all the privileges, money and power. They view themselves as a chosen people. This attitude appears prevalent wherever Calvinism has taken root. It provides the justification for the oppression of the Catholics. The Pope is portrayed as the anti-Christ. This is an inspiration for assassination by the Protestants. On top of this, the Protestants accuse the Catholics of being responsible for most of the murders. The Protestants could not change even if they wanted to. They are blackmailed by Paisley and other Protestant extremists. Any Protestant politician who publicly calls for a reconciliation risks having his reputation ruined by the likes of Paisley.

Protestants misunderstand the Catholic religion. The Catholic Church is a healing church. The Protestants think that a condition of absolution should be that the priest relay the information to the RUC. The confidentiality of the Church is sacred. During the last rites God will forgive anything. If a person is truly sorry they will be forgiven. (I asked Father Faul how the priest would be able to tell whether or not the person is truly sorry. He responded: the priest will be able to tell whether or not the person is truly sorry. This is one of the most important functions of a priest.) The mercy of God is infinite and any sinner can be forgiven. Even informers and terrorists need absolution. Abortion should be illegal. The legality of abortion is another indicator of the bankruptcy of the political system. It is state-sanctioned murder (abortion is illegal in Eire and legal in the United Kingdom).

The Catholic Church is not doing as much as it should but it is doing more than any other group to watch out for the welfare of the Catholics. Occasionally the Church hierarchy will lean on activist priests to lower their profiles and has gone as far as to defrock some priests for their political activity.

Conclusion

On 20 May 1981 (shortly after I conducted these interviews), a local election was held—the first since 1977. The DUP nearly doubled its representation on the local councils (from 74 seats to 142 seats). Alliance Party support was halved (from 70 to 38), while support for the SDLP (113 to 104) and the OUP (179 to 151) declined marginally. Although the local councils do not have significant powers, these votes do serve to indicate the direction of public sentiment. The greatly increased support for the DUP with the decline in support for the Alliance Party, indicates adoption of the more extreme positions by a large segment of the electorate. The DUP is now almost the largest party in Northern Ireland. Its increasing strength could serve to force the OUP into a more extreme stance in an effort to prevent themselves from being out-flanked by the DUP.

It is quite clear that no quick solution to the conflict exists. The best that can be hoped for, at the moment, is the containment of the conflict and the suppression of hostilities to the lowest possible level. In any democratically held elections, the majority of the electorate will vote to maintain the union with Great Britain. However, a hard core minority is prepared to undermine this union by *any* means, including terrorism. Most of the people interviewed stated that the conflict might be resolved if the other side were more reasonable. This circular reasoning will neither effect nor permit a resolution.

There are two pre-requisites for getting the conflict under control. First of all, terrorism of all types and by all parties must be greatly reduced. As long as a climate of terror prevails, normal politics will not be possible. Secondly, the present boundaries between Northern Ireland and Eire must be accepted by all parties as final. Those who live in Ulster are citizens of Great Britain. Those who live in Eire are citizens of Eire. When the present boundaries are accepted, much of the basis for mistrust and hatred will disappear. Then the citizens of Ulster will be able to get on with the business of revitalizing their community.