Unity through Diversity: A Shared Civil Society

‘Globalise resistance’

At midday Tuesday 1 May 2001– May Day – up to one hundred anti-global capitalism protestors stormed Gap, the US based clothes retailer, which had opened a branch on Royal Avenue, the commercial thoroughfare of Belfast city centre. Calling themselves Globalise Resistance, located within the Global Justice Movement, the group has sought to create a broad based mobilization to ‘oppose the neo-liberal policies of the G8, IMF, World Bank and WTO’. A decentralized yet globally linked movement, they ‘seek to increase the involvement of Trade Unions and to increase collaboration between different strands of the movement, including environmentalist, NGOs, progressive faith groups and other campaigning organisations’ (Globalise Resistance 2007).

On Tuesday 1 May 2001, the Belfast branch of Globalise Resistance initiated a sit-down occupation of Gap for a few minutes, where they blew whistles and chanted. After being forced out by the security, the protestors ran across to the opposite side of Royal Avenue to McDonald’s, the fast-food chain. As in Gap, the protestors sat on the floor and waited until security arrived to push them out onto the street. The police had arrived by now. Once on the street, the protestors were quickly on the move. This time they headed up Royal Avenue in the direction of the City Hall until they arrived at the Disney Store; however, the security had been alerted and they managed to shut the doors of the store before the protestors arrived. Standing outside the Disney Store, Globalise Resistance proceeded to hold an impromptu ‘rave’ until the police managed to peacefully disperse them.

The Globalise Resistance protest in Belfast on May Day 2001 was part of a number of similar demonstrations in numerous other locations.
across the globe that day. May Day had been carefully chosen as the
time to initiate the protest because it is the traditional day that social-
ists, anarchists and trade unionists celebrate the International Workers
Movement. Although the Globalise Resistance demonstrations in
Belfast were ostensibly against certain global franchises for their alleged
exploitative use of Third World labour, the protests performed another
crucial function. The attempt to challenge the logic of global capitalism
in Belfast city centre was not just an outgrowth of an insular national-
ism, but also a cosmopolitan act to ‘jump scales’ from the local to the
global. In this way the Globalise Resistance’ protestors were seeking to
show that local/national issues regarding the constitutional position
of Northern Ireland were superfluous to the larger and more pressing
issues of ‘planetary interdependence’ (Melucci 1996). As one protestor
wrote:

May Day’s protest was very significant in Belfast, not only as part of
the global protests, but also because it gives lie to the notion that all
politics here are either orange or green [unionist or nationalist]. The
people on the streets on May Day were both Catholic and Protestant
but their priority was not justice for one cause or one community,
instead it was about justice for the whole of humankind. (Globalise
Resistance 2002)

Social movements and peace

It has been noted in Chapter 2 that a host of theorists have argued
that the consociational politics of the Good Friday Agreement have
encouraged the dominance of ‘identity politics’, which give succour to
inter and intracommunal conflict by institutionalizing difference at
the political level, stifling diversity in the name of communal identity
and for failing to recognize cross-cutting identities. In this apparently
divisive milieu the task, according to some commentators, is to encour-
age ‘those movements that crosscut social divisions, and challenge and
erode the clash of ethno-nationalisms and create new relationships of
mutuality through networking and debate’ (Taylor 2006: 47). Some
civil society groups and social movements seek to provide an alterna-
tive to ethno-national division by promoting a politics of solidarity, a
shared identity capable of mobilizing across the cleavage and policies
of economic redistribution for all groups. In the case of the Globalise
Resistance demonstration described at the beginning of this chapter,
they seek to go beyond ethno-national politics by making us see the