3 Northern Ireland, 1969–97

A BRIEF BACKGROUND TO THE CONFLICT

The English Crown first became involved in Ireland in 1169 when a Welsh-Norman Lord, Richard fitzGilbert de Clare, better known as ‘Strongbow’, led an incursion into Ireland which resulted in Henry II of England declaring himself King of Ireland in 1171, acting on the authority of a Bull Laudabiliter granted in 1154 by Pope Adrian IV. Until the beginning of the modern period, however, the English Crown ruled Ireland in name only with much of Ireland coming under the rule of various feudal Norman-Irish aristocrats.¹ With the development of the modern British state, and its conversion to Protestantism, predominantly Catholic Ireland began to be seen as a dangerous and potentially rebellious part of the state. This led to the plantation and settlement of Ireland by English and lowland Scots Protestant settlers, who were moved into large areas of Ireland – but especially the province of Ulster – from the seventeenth century onwards.² The heirs of these settlers are the Protestant majority in modern Northern Ireland.

By the nineteenth century, the wars and enmity between Protestant and Catholic Europe had died down and as a result, the position of the Catholic population in Ireland was improved. The decision was made in 1801 to unite the Irish Parliament with Westminster, creating a single parliament for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. A strong nationalist movement built up in Ireland. It aimed to seek autonomy within the British empire for Ireland – an idea which became known as home rule.³ Irish home rule was bitterly opposed by the Protestant population of Ireland, who feared being submerged in a unit dominated by Catholics. These Protestants were to become known as the unionists and were concentrated in the province of Ulster. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, there were a number of attempts to introduce home rule to Ireland but they all failed due to the opposition of unionists who threatened to resist any imposition of home rule with violence if necessary. As part of this opposition a paramilitary organisation, the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), was established by leading unionist politicians specifically to fight any imposed form of home rule. Ultimately,
it was decided that home rule would be introduced with two parlia-
ments, one in Belfast and the other in Dublin, but the implementation
of this Bill was postponed by the First World War.  

While the campaign for home rule in Ireland had been largely
peaceful, Irish nationalism has had a militant republican component
for much of its history which has supported full independence from
the United Kingdom. This tradition has also believed in the legitim-
acy of political violence in achieving its objectives. In 1916, militant
republicanism resurrected itself by staging an armed rebellion in
Dublin. The rebellion was quickly repressed but turned out to have
far-reaching effects. Much of the leadership was executed by the
British, an act which resulted in a significant growth in support for the
political party allied to the 1916 rebels,  

\textit{Sinn Féin}. The party won the
majority of parliamentary seats in Ireland outside of Ulster, which
provided legitimacy to the Irish War of Independence in which the
Irish Republican Army (IRA) fought the British until 1921. That year,
the Anglo–Irish Treaty was agreed, and the republican negotiating
team accepted the partition of Ireland and Dominion status for the 26
counties of the Irish Free State. The treaty led to the first of many
splits in the Irish republican movement and the Civil War in Ireland
between pro- and anti-treaty factions of the IRA. Ultimately, the pro-
treaty forces won the Civil War and formed the Free State's first
government. The linear descendant of this faction is the  

\textit{Fine Gael}
party, which was the largest partner in the Irish coalition government
between December 1994 and June 1997. Most of the defeated anti-
treaty forces decided to accept the new status quo after a few years
and formed the political party  

\textit{Fianna Fáil}. This left a rump of hard-
core republicans who still preserved the physical force tradition in
Irish politics and kept the name IRA. The Irish Free State left the
British Commonwealth in 1949 and declared itself a Republic and, in
doing so, exaggerated the separation between the independent south
and the British north.

In Northern Ireland, where Protestants were the majority of the
population, the autonomous Northern Ireland Parliament was estab-
lished in Belfast in 1921. The seat of government and the legislature
were eventually based in the Stormont building in Belfast's suburbs.
At the same time, Northern Ireland continued to send 12 MPs to
Westminster. This mini-state was dominated by unionists who delib-
erately excluded local Catholics from political power. The state also
permitted widespread discrimination in favour of Protestants in most
areas of employment and housing, causing significant disparity