

*Ch. 4 - The End of the O'Neill Era and  
the Emergence of the Civil Rights  
Movement, 1967-1969*

# Learning Intentions

In this chapter you will learn about:

- Nationalist and unionist opposition to O'Neill's reforms
- Ian Paisley
- The civil rights movement in Northern Ireland
- The fall of O'Neill

# Northern Ireland Civil Rights Movement

# O'Neill Faces a Backlash

- Terence O'Neill's attempts to reconcile the Catholic community with the Unionist government was strongly opposed by a number of unionist organisations, including the Orange Order, Apprentice Boys, the Royal Black Order and by members of his own party, who believed that this would undermine their dominance in Northern Ireland. He also faced criticism from the nationalist community, who were growing frustrated with the lack of real change. The nationalists had a number of specific grievances:
  - The practice of **gerrymandering** meant that nationalists remained under-represented at local council level, as well as nationally in Stormont. Gerrymandering was most prevalent in 12 local councils, including Derry city and the border areas of Tyrone and Fermanagh.
  - The right to vote in local elections was limited by the **property qualification**. Only people who owned their homes, and the spouses of homeowners, were allowed to vote. Business owners were permitted to have a number of votes, up to a maximum of six, according to the number of properties they owned. The property qualification greatly limited the number of people entitled to vote. It excluded people who rented their homes and adults living with their parents. The property qualification remained in force in Northern Ireland into the 1960s, when it had been long since abolished in the rest of the United Kingdom and in the South.

# O'Neill Faces a Backlash

- **Social housing** was used by Unionist councils as a means of securing votes. In gerrymandered areas, unionist-controlled councils were reluctant to provide Catholics with social housing because, as property holders, this would give them a vote in local elections. In these areas, the majority of social housing was given to Protestants, whose votes helped to secure Unionist control locally. An example of this was Derry corporation's rejection of the Derry Housing Association's proposal to build 500 houses in the city's north ward. This was a Unionist-controlled electoral ward, and the corporation, which was under Unionist control, feared that additional housing would increase the number of Catholics in the ward, and their votes could undermine the Unionist authorities' political control of the city. Housing was more fairly supplied to Catholics in areas that had large Protestant majorities, because here Catholic votes could not upset the political balance. In fact, throughout the North as a whole, Catholics tended to benefit more from social housing than Protestants, because they tended to have large families.

# O'Neill Faces a Backlash

- Catholics continued to face **discrimination in jobs**. Most new industries were located in Protestant areas east of the River Bann. Some nationalists saw this as an attempt to force Catholics to migrate from their strongholds west of the River Bann, thus weakening nationalist areas. In 1971 unemployment among Catholic men was 17.7%, three times higher than among Protestant men. Catholics often worked in low-paying jobs, and in the public sector few reached senior management positions. According to a report drawn up by the Campaign for Social Justice in 1964 (See below), all senior management positions in Derry Borough Council were held by Protestants, where overall there were 145 Protestants earning £124,424 and 32 Catholics earning a total of £20,420. Nationalists also faced prejudice through legislation, such as the **Special Powers Act, 1922**, which gave the government power to introduce internment without trial and ban protest marches, and was used almost exclusively against nationalists. **Policing** was also a major concern for Catholics. They faced regular intimidation from the RUC and the **sectarian B-Specials**, who served as a part-time police service.

# Key Concept: Sectarianism

- **Sectarianism** is the practice of hating or discriminating against a social group because of their religious, political or cultural beliefs and customs. Sectarianism often results in people being treated unfairly, by failing to give them equal opportunities in education, employment or welfare, for example. Sectarianism leads to conflict between people of different religions or political affiliations.

# Key Concept: Civil Rights

- **Civil rights** are basic guarantees the people in a democratic society are treated equally, regardless of their religion, race, gender or politics. These rights usually entitle people to free speech and association, and the right to protest peacefully.
- In the late 1960s and into the 1970s the civil rights movement emerged in Northern Ireland as Catholics sought to be treated equally to Protestants by the Northern Irish government.

# The Beginning of the Civil Rights Campaign

- The **Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ)** was one of the first notable movements to campaign against the prejudice faced by the nationalist community. The CSJ was founded by husband and wife **Conn** and **Patricia McCluskey**, among others, in January 1964. In its founding statement, *Why Justice Can Not Be Done*, the CSJ set out its goal: to highlight factual examples of the discrimination experienced by the North's Catholic community, particularly in the areas of housing and local government.
- The CSJ was not a political nationalist movement. In February 1964 it issued a report, *The Plain Truth*, citing specific examples of discrimination in a number of towns and cities across Northern Ireland.
- *There is practically no representation of the minority on the Boards of Public Bodies, consequently virtually all the "plum" jobs from Consulting Surgeons to Town Clerks go to Conservatives and Unionists.*
- *Even the opportunity to work is denied first to Nationalists. As a result of this they make up by far the biggest proportion of the "dole" queues, and are forced to emigrate - to suit the Government voting policy.*
- The CSJ hoped to win British public support:
- *The British Taxpayer keeps the Northern Ireland State in existence with an annual grant of over 46 million pounds. Since you are one of these taxpayers and have shown so often how much you cherish freedom, please ask your Member of Parliament if he is satisfied with this state of affairs in Northern Ireland.*



# The Beginning of the Civil Rights Campaign

- When the CSJ presented its report to Westminster politicians, a number of Labour MPs, including the party leader, **Harold Wilson**, supported them. When the Labour Party won the British general election that year, it was hoped that they would engage with the issues raised by the CSJ, but as Prime Minister, Wilson proved reluctant to become involved. He praised O'Neill's efforts to develop better relations with Catholics, but stated that it was not the British government's place to interfere in the internal affairs of Northern Ireland.
- However, in 1965 a number of Labour MPs formed the **Campaign for Democracy in Ulster (CDU)** to press the Unionist government to respond to Catholics' concerns. In 1966 a Republican Labour candidate, **Gerry Fitt**, was elected as Westminster MP for West Belfast. In parliament, Fitt regularly spoke out about the treatment of Catholics in Northern Ireland, and won further support from Labour MPs. Wilson, still unwilling to get involved in the internal politics of Northern Ireland, continued to insist that it was the responsibility of O'Neill's government to engage with the Catholic community.

# Trade Unions

- During 1964 and into 1965 the Northern Ireland Committee of the **Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU)** met with O'Neill to ask him to repeal the property qualification in local elections and introduce the fairer system of **one man, one vote**. They also asked the government to abolish the Special Powers Act. It is important to note that both the CSJ's and ICTU's main concerns were the unfairness they saw in government policy and had nothing to do with ending partition. To highlight their separateness from more nationalist civil rights groups, the CSJ and ICTU campaigned under the slogan '*British rights for British citizens*'.
- When O'Neill's government refused to agree to the steps they proposed, ICTU held a conference in 1965 and condemned the government's failure to introduce meaningful reform. ICTU and the CSJ succeeded in winning support for their cause, but their efforts were not enough to effect change.

## Key Personality: Patricia (1914-2010) and Conn McClusky (1914-2013)

- **Patricia and Conn McCluskey**, a schoolteacher and doctor respectively, were key figures in the early development of the Northern Irish civil rights movement. During the Second World War, Patricia, who was born in Armagh, helped to rehome children that had been evacuated from Belfast.

## Speaking Out On Homelessness

- When the couple married, Conn, who was from Co. Down, established his practice in Dungannon, Co. Tyrone. The couple largely avoided nationalist and unionist politics and instead focused on civil rights for all the people of Northern Ireland. It was through Conn's work that the couple became acutely aware of the poor housing conditions and high levels of homelessness. In the early 1960s they drew attention to the lack of social housing for Catholics and the discrimination they experienced from Unionist-controlled local councils. This led Patricia to found the Homeless Citizens' League in 1963, which organised demonstrations and the occupation of vacant housing. As a member of Dungannon Council, Patricia regularly highlighted the issues of housing and gerrymandering.

## Campaign for Social Justice

- They founded the Campaign for Social Justice (CSJ) in January 1964. At their initial meeting the couple set out the purpose of the CSJ, which was to bring *'the light of publicity to bear on the discrimination which exists in our community against the Catholic section of that community, representing more than one-third of the total population'*. The CSJ compiled information on Catholic inequality, including political gerrymandering and discrimination in housing and employment. This information formed the basis of a report published in 1967 called *The Plain Truth*.

## The First Civil Rights March

- The report influenced the foundation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA), which became the dominant civil rights organisation of the 1960s. NICRA attracted support from both the moderate nationalist and unionist communities, as well as wider support from the South and Britain. On 24 August 1968 the CSJ and NICRA, along with other groups, held the North's first civil rights march from Coalisland to Dungannon. The march was met by a counter-demonstration organised by loyalists. Nonetheless, the success of the march led to the formation of branches of NICRA throughout the North.

## Resigning From NICRA

- The McCluskeys and others resigned from the executive of NICRA following the emergence of more militant elements in the movement after the events of 1969. However, their work had been fundamental to the foundation of the civil rights movement in Northern Ireland. Following Conn's retirement, the McCluskeys moved to Australia and later returned to live in Dublin.

## Exam Questions

- Write a short paragraph on Conn and Patricia McCluskey (2021) OL
- What did Conn and Patricia McCluskey contribute to the Civil Rights movement in Northern Ireland? (2016) OL

# Ian Paisley Opposes O'Neill

- Within the unionist community, the **Reverend Ian Paisley** emerged as the most vocal opponent of O'Neill's outreach to Catholics. Paisley had gained a reputation for delivering inflammatory speeches designed to generate unrest. For example, in a speech in 1969 he referred to Catholics saying that '*They breed like rabbits and multiply like vermin.*' This led to Paisley being labelled a **bigot** by those who opposed his views. Paisley had almost caused a riot during the 1964 general election when he demanded that the Irish tricolour be removed from above the office of a West Belfast Sinn Féin candidate; Paisley even threatened to lead a group of his supporters to take it down. When the RUC finally removed the flag, a riot erupted lasting two days. The **Divis Street Riot** was the worst seen in Northern Ireland for decades.
- Paisley soon became the leader of loyalist opposition to Catholic civil rights and ecumenism. He also led the opposition to O'Neill's leadership. He began an '**O'Neill must go**' campaign in 1965, calling O'Neill a traitor to the Protestant people, and even going so far as to claim that O'Neill was not a true Protestant. Many working-class Protestants, who were worried by the growing prosperity of the Catholic middle class, supported Paisley's views. While moderate unionists supported O'Neill's meeting with Lemass, Paisley and his supporters organised a protest and threw snowballs at the Taoiseach's car.

# Ian Paisley Opposes O'Neill

- Growing opposition to O'Neill made it difficult for the Prime Minister to introduce political or civil reforms without running the risk of worsening sectarian tensions. There were calls from within the Unionist Party for O'Neill to step down as Prime Minister, and by 1967 opposition to his leadership had become extremely heated. Within the UUP O'Neill faced opposition from both **William Craig** and **Brian Faulkner**. Both men actively sought to undermine O'Neill's position. For example, Craig, as Minister of Home Affairs, had ordered the RUC to ban civil rights marches. Actions such as these made it difficult for O'Neill to live up to his promises to the Catholic community. He was increasingly finding himself caught between Catholic expectations and unionist resistance.
- While giving a speech in Tyrone during the annual 12 July celebrations, **George Forrest**, Unionist MP for mid-Ulster and a supporter of O'Neill, was dragged from the podium and kicked unconscious by fellow members of the Orange Order. O'Neill himself came under attack in 1968, when unionists threw missiles at him in protest at his calls for greater cooperation between Northern Ireland's two communities.

# Key Concept: Bigotry

- **Bigotry** is the refusal to respect other people's views or beliefs. It is usually associated with political or religious intolerance towards those who hold opposing views.
- In Northern Ireland, bigotry was prevalent between nationalists and unionists. Many unionist political leaders were labelled bigots for their refusal to acknowledge the grievances of the nationalist community.

# The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association

- A new civil rights organisation, the **Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA)**, was founded on 9 April 1967 in Belfast. NICRA's goals were:
  - one man, one vote an end to gerrymandering equality in housing and jobs
  - the abolition of the Special Powers Act
  - the disbanding of the B-Specials, who were often responsible for terrorising Catholic communities.
- NICRA served as an umbrella organisation uniting a large number of people from different backgrounds. Among its notable members was the independent nationalist politician, John Hume, and civil rights campaigner Conn McCluskey. Groups who supported NICRA included:
  - moderate nationalist and unionist politicians
  - nationalist groups, including members of the GAA and the IRA
  - trade unions civil rights groups student groups
  - socialists and communists.
- Like the CSJ, NICRA campaigned for *British rights for British citizens*.



# The Unionist Attitude to NICRA

- The formation of NICRA, despite the fact that it had some moderate unionist members, alarmed unionists, who believed it was an attempt to undermine their position in Northern Ireland. In particular, the demand for one man, one vote represented a credible threat to the Unionist Party's control of gerrymandered areas, where Catholics were most numerous. There was also a belief that NICRA was a front for the IRA, who would use the movement to further the republican cause. Indeed, some members of the IRA did join NICRA and other organisations in an attempt to achieve their goals through peaceful means. NICRA's alleged republican influences offered the Unionist government an excuse to denounce the civil rights association as a republican movement that threatened the stability of Northern Ireland and thus ignore their demands for change.

# The Campaign Begins

- NICRA believed in campaigning peacefully, taking inspiration from the American civil rights movement led by Martin Luther King Jr. Their strategy was to organise peaceful marches in towns throughout Northern Ireland. On 27 April 1968, NICRA held a protest rally in opposition to the banning of a republican Easter parade. To many nationalists it was blatant hypocrisy that nationalist parades were banned while the Orange Order was allowed to hold hundreds of commemorative parades every year.
- Like the US civil rights campaign, NICRA took up the cases of individuals that highlighted government discrimination against Catholics. In August 1968 NICRA held a march in Dungannon, Co. Tyrone, to protest at the local council's mistreatment of Martin Luther King, leader of the civil rights movement in the USA Catholics on the housing list.
- Catholic families from **Caledon**, Co. Tyrone who were on the waiting list had been encouraged by their local Nationalist MP, **Austin Currie**, to squat (unlawfully occupy) two empty council houses. They were subsequently removed by the RUC. The Unionist-dominated council then gave one of these houses to a single, 19-year-old Protestant girl, Emilie Bettie, who also happened to be the local Unionist MP's secretary. In what became known as the **Caledon Affair**, Currie gained widespread media attention when he, along with two others, occupied one of the Caledon council houses. He was later forcefully evicted by Bettie's brother, who happened to be a member of the RUC. The incident was captured by a television crew, putting a spotlight on the discrimination in housing in Northern Ireland.

# The Campaign Begins

- Currie subsequently approached NICRA for support. NICRA, led by Gerry Fitt and Austin Currie, held a protest march from Coalisland to Dungannon with a group of around 2,500 people. In response to the march, Ian Paisley and his supporters held a counter-demonstration in Dungannon, claiming that NICRA was really just a cover organisation for the IRA. AS NICRA approached Dungannon they were verbally abused by a loyalist gathering of around 1,500 from behind an RUC barrier. The RUC prevented the marchers from entering Dungannon, fearing that violence would break out if they came in contact with Paisley's group. Instead a series of speeches were delivered by leading members of the march to a peaceful crowd. Later as some members of NICRA attempted to move past the blockade, the RUC responded by baton charging the marchers. Order was eventually restored when the leadership of NICRA convinced their supporters to restrain their anger.

# Mini Bio: Austin Currie

- Austin Currie was born in Co. Tyrone to a Catholic family. Between 1964 and 1972 he served as a Nationalist Party Stormont MP for East Down. He was a key figure in the civil rights movements and a supporter of NICRA. His protest at Caledon received widespread media coverage and highlighted the sectarian inequalities in housing in the North. Currie was a founding member of the SDLP. In 1974 he served as Minister for Housing in the Northern Ireland Executive. Having moved to the Republic of Ireland in the late 1980s, he served as a Fine Gael TD and also ran unsuccessfully in the 1990 presidential campaign.

# The Derry March, 5th October 1968

- Following a request from **Eamonn McCann** and **Eamonn Melaugh** of the Derry Housing Action Committee, NICRA decided to hold a march in Derry on 5 October. NICRA planned to march through the mainly Protestant Waterside area of Derry, as a sign that they were not a sectarian association.
- However, unionist groups, including the **Apprentice Boys of Derry**, later announced that they also planned to hold a march on the same day, along the same route. This was the same tactic that Paisley had used in Dungannon to prevent NICRA from entering the town.
- Minister for Home Affairs **William Craig** announced that he was banning the NICRA march. When he was later advised by the RUC that he should also ban the Apprentice Boys march, he banned both marches, and said that future marches should only take place in areas where they would not provoke unrest.
- In defiance of Craig's ban, the Derry committee announced that they intended to go ahead. Leading members of NICRA tried to persuade them not to, but after much debate on the day before the march, NICRA finally agreed to support the protest. Eamonn McCann later admitted that:
- *'our conscious if unspoken strategy was to provoke the police into over-reaction and thus spark of a mass reaction against the authorities'* (A History of Ulster by Jonathan Bardon).

# The Derry March, 5th October 1968

- Around 400 demonstrators went ahead with the march through the Waterside area of Derry on 5 October. Despite their reservations, many of the most prominent figures of NICRA, including John Hume, Betty Sinclair and Gerry Fitt, took part. Fitt had arrived with three British Labour MPs so that they could witness first-hand what was going on in Northern Ireland. Members of the British and foreign media were also present to report on the day's events.
- As the march got under way, the demonstrators found that their route had been blocked by the RUC. They took an alternative route to avoid the blockade. The RUC responded by launching an attack on the marchers, resulting in several serious injuries. Gerry Fitt was hospitalised having received head injuries during the RUC baton charge. Local Catholic youths, who were not part of the march, began throwing stones at the police. The violence continued into the next day, with petrol bombs being thrown at the RUC and local businesses looted and destroyed. Because the media were present, images of the day's events were shown across the world, and sparked off an outcry against police treatment of the demonstrators.

# Mini Bio: Austin Currie

- Eamonn McCann was born to a Catholic family in Derry. He was an original member of the Derry Housing Action Committee and joined with the NICRA in leading the civil rights movement. He served as an election agent for Bernadette Devlin during the same period. He has written extensively on Bloody Sunday since 1972 and established the Bloody Sunday Justice Campaign. He briefly served as Member of the Legislative Assembly (MLA) for Foyle in 2016.

# O'Neill Responds to the Crisis

- Due to the widespread media coverage of the events in Northern Ireland, O'Neill came under intense pressure to resolve the crisis. Wilson summoned him to Westminster and informed O'Neill that unless he brought in immediate reforms the British government would cut the financial subsidies they were providing to the Northern Irish government. O'Neill now had no choice but to announce a series of reforms in an attempt to meet some of the demands of the civil rights movement.



# O'Neill's Five-Point Programme

- O'Neill produced the following five-point programme of reforms:
  - The government would appoint an Ombudsman to deal with complaints against government departments.
  - A points system would be introduced to decide on people's eligibility for council housing.
  - Londonderry (Derry) corporation would be replaced by a new Development Commission.
  - The Special Powers Act would be abolished.
  - The government would consider the introduction of one man, one vote in local elections.
- While the civil rights campaigners welcomed these measures, the failure to commit to the introduction of one man, one vote meant that they continued their campaign. Unionists, meanwhile, were furious that O'Neill appeared to be giving in to Catholic demands.
- On 9 December 1968, O'Neill delivered a televised address to the people of Northern Ireland. He told viewers that:
- *Ulster stands at the crossroads.. our conduct over the coming days and weeks will decide our future... For more than five years I have tried to heal some of the deep divisions in our community. I did so because I could not see how an Ulster divided against itself could hope to stand. I made it clear that a Northern Ireland based upon the interests of any one section rather than upon the interests of all could have no long-term future.*

# O'Neill's Five-Point Programme

- O'Neill also explained that he had no choice but to introduce reforms, because without Britain's financial subsidies the North could not survive. Towards the end of his address O'Neill asked:
- *What kind of Ulster do you want? A happy and respected province in good standing with the rest of the United Kingdom? Or a place continually torn apart by riots and demonstrations and regarded by the rest of Britain as a political outcast?*
- O'Neill's appeal drew little sympathy from fellow unionists. William Craig, the Minister for Home Affairs, accused O'Neill of bowing to nationalist pressure. O'Neill responded by sacking Craig.
- Elsewhere, though, O'Neill's speech received a largely positive response from both communities, and NICRA decided to call off its marches until 11 January to avoid provoking any more violence. O'Neill's position as Prime Minister now appeared to be secure, as people were willing to give him the time he needed to introduce his reforms. However, the situation in Northern Ireland remained tense.

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## Exam Question

- Why did the Civil Rights movement emerge in Northern Ireland and was it successful? (2017) HL

# Bernadette Devlin and People's Democracy

- A new student movement called **People's Democracy** emerged following the violence in Derry on 5 October 1968. It was led by 21-year-old student **Bernadette Devlin** and 24-year-old **Michael Farrell**, among others. People's Democracy was founded at a time when radical student activism was becoming more common across Europe and the USA. In the USA, student groups championed the civil rights movement and opposed US involvement in the Vietnam War. In Europe, many student groups campaigned on both international and national issues. The goals of People's Democracy were the same as NICRA's, but their methods were more provocative.

# Return to Violence

- People's Democracy believed that O'Neill's reforms were designed to weaken the civil rights movement. They deliberately continued to hold their own marches, despite NICRA calling a halt for the time being. These marches often came under attack from loyalists.
- On 4 January 1969, People's Democracy organised a march from Belfast to Derry, in open defiance of O'Neill's call for an end to such actions. As the group of around 50 demonstrators approached Burntollet Bridge in Derry, they were met by a loyalist crowd, which included a large number of off-duty B-Specials. When the demonstrators approached the bridge, they were attacked with stones and iron bars. The RUC did not intervene to prevent the attack. In fact, later that evening the police attacked Catholic homes in the Bogside area of Derry, sparking off another outbreak of riots in the city.
- After Burntollet, Bernadette Devlin claimed a victory for People's Democracy:
- *Our function in marching from Belfast to Derry was to break the truce, to relaunch the civil rights movement as a mass movement and to show people that O'Neill was, in fact, offering them nothing. We knew we wouldn't finish the march without getting molested, and we were accused of going out looking for trouble.* (Planning Derry: Planning and Politics in Northern Ireland by Gerald McSheffrey)

# O'Neill's Downfall

- The return to violence was a disaster for O'Neill. The day after the march he went on television to denounce the actions of People's Democracy, describing its members as 'foolhardy and irresponsible'. O'Neill's speech failed to acknowledge the role played by unionists and the B-Specials at Burntollet Bridge, and drew much criticism from nationalists and civil rights groups. An inquiry into the incident, the Cameron Report, was published in September 1969. The report found fault not just with People's Democracy but also with the actions of the RUC and the B-Specials: *'there was unauthorised and irregular use of batons by certain unidentified policemen in the Duke Street cordon at a very early stage of the confrontation between police and demonstrators'*.
- Matters grew worse for O'Neill. **Brian Faulkner**, Minister for Commerce, resigned in protest at O'Neill's proposed reforms of local government. Faulkner's resignation was followed by the resignation of the Minister for Health, **William Morgan**. Twelve Unionist Party MPs demanded that O'Neill resign as Prime Minister. To secure his position, O'Neill called a general election for February 1969 in the hope that he would be returned to power and his critics silenced.

# The 1969 General Election

- The Unionist Party won an additional three seats, but O'Neill's position was still not safe because all the Unionist MPs who opposed him were re-elected. Paisley had stood as a Protestant Unionist in the same constituency as O'Neill, and while Paisley failed to get elected, there were only 1,414 votes between the two men. A number of civil rights campaigners, including John Hume, won seats for the nationalist side, while Bernadette Devlin failed to win a seat for People's Democracy.
- The month after the election, O'Neill introduced a **Public Order Bill that banned demonstrations** by civil rights groups such as NICRA. From the government's point of view, this was an attempt to prevent public disorder, but the measure served to heighten sectarian tensions as Catholics now felt that they were forbidden from demanding equal treatment. Violence flared between the RUC and Catholics in Derry on 19 April, resulting in a three-day riot. During the riots there were reports that members of the RUC were attacking Catholics without provocation, and in one instance a family was assaulted in their home, resulting in one death.
- On 17 April Bernadette Devlin was elected as a Westminster MP in the Mid-Ulster by-election. Devlin's success was a victory for People's Democracy, but caused further damage to O'Neill's leadership as she had beaten a Unionist Party candidate. In Westminster Devlin delivered a scathing speech denouncing the treatment of Catholics in Northern Ireland.

# The 1969 General Election

- On 22 April O'Neill finally decided to announce that he was going to introduce one man, one vote in local elections. He faced an immediate backlash from unionists, including the Apprentice Boys. The following day, O'Neill's cousin, **James Chichester-Clark**, resigned from government in protest. The reform was passed by the Unionist Party, but it was too late for O'Neill. The sectarian violence in Northern Ireland was escalating beyond his control. In March 1969, leading figures in NICRA, including Conn McCluskey and Betty Sinclair, had resigned from the NICRA executive in protest at what they saw as the hijacking of the movement by more militant groups, such as People's Democracy and the IRA.
- Disorder and violence intensified. There were bomb attacks at water and electricity stations. The RUC and Unionist Party were quick to claim that these were the actions of the IRA and demanded that O'Neill introduce strong measures to tackle the crisis. It later emerged that a group of loyalists were responsible for the bombings. They were opposed to O'Neill's electoral reforms and hoped that their actions would force his resignation.
- The loyalist tactics worked. On 28 April, O'Neill delivered a televised address announcing that he was stepping down as Prime Minister:
- *I have no regrets for six years in which I have tried to break the chains of ancient hatred. I have been unable to realise during my period of office all that I had sought to achieve. Whether now it can be achieved in my lifetime, I do not know. But one day these things will and must be achieved.* (A Tragedy of Errors: The Misgovernment of Northern Ireland by *Kenneth Bloomfield*)



# Exam Question

- What were the main social and economic problems facing Northern Ireland, 1949-1969, and how effectively were they tackled? (2017) HL

# Key Personality: Captain Terence O'Neill (1914-1990)

- **Terence O'Neill** was born in London to a wealthy, landowning Protestant family. His father, Captain Arthur O'Neill, was a Conservative MP, and the first Westminster MP to be killed during World War I. His mother was Lady Annabel Hungerford Crewes-Milnes. O'Neill was educated in London, attending Eton and the Royal Military College, Sandhurst, after which he became an officer in the Irish Guards and served during World War II.

## Entry into Politics

- O'Neill's family relocated to Northern Ireland after the war and in 1946 he was elected as an Ulster Unionist Party MP for the Bannside constituency. In 1956 he was appointed Minister for Finance, and after Lord Brookeborough's resignation in 1963 he became the Prime Minister of Northern Ireland. His appointment annoyed some Unionist Party members, who believed that he got the position because of his aristocratic connections, rather than on political merit.



## Reconciliation

- As Prime Minister, O'Neill spoke of reconciling the Catholic community with the Northern Irish government. However, his most pressing concern was securing Protestant support for the Unionist Party in the wake of the electoral successes of the Northern Ireland Labour Party. He focused on expanding the North's economy in the hope that this would win support for his government. His economic policies brought foreign investment to the North. However, the Catholic minority remained marginalised because of the West of the Bann Policy, which saw the majority of new industries established in the Protestant communities in the east of the province.
- O'Neill visited Catholic schools and hospitals in the North, and met with Taoiseach Seán Lemass, which won him the support of nationalists. However, when O'Neill failed to introduce meaningful reforms, Catholic grievances found a new voice in the civil rights movement. This created a huge problem for O'Neill, who had to deal with nationalist demands while at the same time maintaining the support of unionist colleagues who were opposed to the introduction of political equality for Catholics.

## Opposition Within His Own Party

- When the civil rights campaign met with sectarian violence, O'Neill introduced a five-point plan to grant more political and social equality to the Catholic minority. These measures were strongly opposed by members of his cabinet as well as a large proportion of the wider unionist community. O'Neill called a general election in 1969 to win support for his policies. However, he narrowly secured his own seat, while all the Unionist Party members who opposed him were re-elected. After a series of bombings carried out by the UVF, which damaged Belfast city's water supply, O'Neill resigned as Prime Minister in April 1969, having come under pressure from his party colleagues to step down.

## Missed Opportunity

- Unionists who had refused to accept O'Neill's reforms lit bonfires to celebrate his resignation. O'Neill himself said that he had tried to *'break the chains of ancient hatred'*. However, his reforms exposed the North's deep-rooted sectarian tensions, which erupted in the Troubles only a few months after he stepped down as Prime Minister.

## Exam Questions

- Would you agree that Terence O'Neill failed as a political leader? Argue your case. (2018) HL
- What was the contribution of Terence O'Neill to the affairs of Northern Ireland? (2017) HL Write a short paragraph on Terence O'Neill. (2018) OL
- Do you consider the premiership of Terence O'Neill a success or a failure? Argue your case. (2017) OL

# Assessment of O'Neill as Prime Minister

- O'Neill had proved to be a divisive leader in the Unionist Party. His personality, he freely admitted, was not as outgoing as his predecessor's, and he tended to make decisions that were often at odds with the views of his cabinet. This in no small part contributed to a number of Unionist MPs taking issue with his leadership.
- While O'Neill's early attempts to reconcile with the Catholic community were met with a positive response, his failure to introduce reforms in a timely manner meant that he quickly lost much of the goodwill he had generated. Of particular note was his government's failure to change the West of the Bann Policy, which continued the practice of allowing Catholic areas to go undeveloped.
- Nationalist frustration gave rise to the civil rights movement, which in turn generated a reaction from loyalists who were hostile to O'Neill's attempts to introduce reforms.
- As sectarian tensions escalated, O'Neill never fully engaged with the situation. He offered a number of concessions to Catholics, but avoided going too far so as to maintain unionist support. In March and April pressure mounted on O'Neill following a series of bombings at a number of power stations and water works. These bombings were blamed on the IRA, but the UVF was in fact responsible.

# Assessment of O'Neill as Prime Minister

- When O'Neill finally took the decision to introduce one man, one vote in April 1969, the reaction from members of his own party and unionists in general forced him to resign. While he had set out as Prime Minister with the intention of building bridges between Northern Ireland's communities, his leadership resulted in the emergence of a level of violence not seen in the North since the 1920s.

## Exam Questions

- To what extent did Terence O'Neill differ from Lord Brookeborough as leader of Northern Ireland? (2019) HL (similar 2009 HL)
- How effective was the contribution of Terence O'Neill to the affairs of Northern Ireland? (2012) HL
- How did Terence O'Neill attempt to bring about change in Northern Ireland? (2015) OL

# Recap

You should now be able to:

- Understand the, sometimes conflicting, views within unionism and the fact that there were many unionists who opposed O'Neill's attempts to reconcile with the Catholic community
- Appreciate that one of O'Neill's most vocal opponents was Ian Paisley, whose inflammatory speeches increased sectarian tensions
- Recognise that O'Neill's failure to introduce meaningful reforms led to the founding of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association in 1967 and that while O'Neill promised to introduce further reforms these were opposed by unionist groups
- Understand that NICRA was supported by moderate nationalists and campaigned peacefully for an end to discrimination
- Assess the successes and failures of the civil rights movement
- Discuss why O'Neill lost support, leading to his resignation in 1969

# Questions: Revision

1. What were the main grievances Catholics had against the Unionist government?
2. Explain the terms sectarianism and civil rights.
3. What was the Campaign for Social Justice?
4. Why was British Prime Minister Harold Wilson initially reluctant to engage with the issues raised by the Campaign for Social Justice?
5. What role did Gerry Fitt and John Hume play in highlighting Catholic grievances?
6. Why did the Reverend Ian Paisley's opponents label him a bigot?
7. What was the 'O'Neill must go' campaign?
8. What were the demands of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA)?
9. How did unionists respond to the formation of NICRA?
10. What did Ian Paisley and his supporters do to prevent NICRA marching to Dungannon in August 1968?
11. How did Terence O'Neill respond to the violence of August 1968?
12. Why was the NICRA march in Derry on 5 October 1968 controversial?
13. What was People's Democracy?
14. What was the purpose of the People's Democracy march from Belfast to Derry and was it successful?
15. Why did O'Neill call a general election in 1969?
16. Briefly describe the events that contributed to O'Neill's resignation in April 1969.



# Higher Level Questions

1. What were the causes of the civil rights movement and how did Terence O'Neill respond to it?
2. Why did the Civil Rights Movement emerge in Northern Ireland and how successful were civil rights leaders in highlighting their grievances?
3. How did unionists, such as Ian Paisley, respond to the Civil Rights Movement?
4. How did Terence O'Neill respond to Catholic grievances and how successful was he?

# Ordinary Level Questions

1. Write a short paragraph on one of the following:
  - a. Conn and Patricia McCluskey
  - b. The Campaign for Social Justice
  - c. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association
  - d. Terence O'Neill's Five-Point Programme.
2. What developments took place in the civil rights movement during the period 1967-1969?
3. How did Ian Paisley oppose O'Neill's efforts to reach out to the North's Catholic community?