

Chapter 5: The Beginning of the Troubles, 1969-1972

Introduction

Between 1969 and 1972, Northern Ireland entered a period of sustained violence that would become known as the Troubles. Sectarian divisions deepened, political reforms failed to prevent escalating conflict, and the emergence of paramilitary groups on both sides worsened the situation. The period saw the Battle of the Bogside, the deployment of the British Army, the formation of the Provisional IRA, internment, Bloody Sunday, and the introduction of direct rule from Westminster.

1. The Leadership of James Chichester-Clark (1969-1971)

Becoming Prime Minister

- Chichester-Clark succeeded Terence O'Neill as Northern Ireland's Prime Minister in May 1969.
- Defeated Brian Faulkner in a close leadership ballot.
- Took office amid escalating sectarian violence.

Attempts to Contain Unrest

- Declared an amnesty for those involved in 1969 riots, including Ian Paisley.
- NICRA agreed to suspend demonstrations, but violence continued.
- Faced increasing tension due to the marching season (April-August 1969).
- Operation Banner (August 1969): 500 British troops deployed to support the RUC.

2. The Battle of the Bogside (August 1969)

Background

- 12 August 1969: The Apprentice Boys of Derry planned their annual march.
- 15,000 loyalists gathered, marching near the Catholic Bogside area.
- Nationalists viewed the march as an assertion of unionist dominance.
- John Hume and the Irish government requested a reroute, but were ignored.

Riots and Escalation

- Apprentice Boys threw coins at Catholics, triggering clashes.
- The RUC tried to force their way into the Bogside, but were blocked by barricades.
- Nationalists declared the Bogside and Creggan areas "Free Derry".
- The RUC used tear gas (CS gas) for the first time in the UK, but this worsened the situation.
- The B-Specials were deployed, further inflaming nationalist anger.

Irish and British Reactions

- Taoiseach Jack Lynch condemned the violence, stating:
 - “Stormont is no longer in control of the situation.”
 - Lynch sent the Irish Army to the border but did not intervene.
- British Prime Minister Harold Wilson ordered the British Army to restore order.
- On 14 August, British troops entered Northern Ireland for the first time since partition.

Impact

- 10 people killed, 154 shot, 700 injured, and 170 homes destroyed.
- 2,000 families fled the violence, the majority of them Catholic.
- British Army initially welcomed by nationalists, but tensions grew over time.

3. The Hunt Report and Reforms (1969-1970)

Reforms Introduced by Chichester-Clark

- The Hunt Report (October 1969):
 - Abolished the B-Specials.
 - Disarmed the RUC.
 - Encouraged Catholics to join the police.
 - Created the Ulster Defence Regiment (UDR) as a part-time military force.
- Voting reforms introduced, including “one man, one vote” (effective from 1973).
- New Housing Executive took over housing allocation to prevent discrimination.

Unionist Reaction

- Loyalists opposed the abolition of the B-Specials, seeing it as a betrayal.
- Loyalist paramilitaries, including the UDA, emerged.
- The first RUC officer was killed by loyalists in 1969, marking the beginning of unionist violence.

4. The Rise of Paramilitarism

Formation of the Provisional IRA (PIRA)

- The IRA split in December 1969:
 - Official IRA (OIRA): Marxist, focused on political struggle.
 - Provisional IRA (PIRA): Armed struggle for a 32-county republic.
- The PIRA saw itself as defenders of Catholic areas.
- IRA recruitment increased after British Army raids in nationalist areas.

Loyalist Paramilitary Groups

- Ulster Defence Association (UDA) (1971):

- Formed to protect Protestant areas.
- Engaged in attacks on Catholics, often under the cover name **Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF)**.
- **Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF)** became more active.
- **Loyalists** launched bombings and assassinations against nationalists.

5. The Introduction of Internment (August 1971)

Faulkner Becomes PM (March 1971)

- Brian Faulkner replaced Chichester-Clark as Prime Minister.
- Took a hardline stance on security.
- Introduced internment without trial (9 August 1971).

Operation Demetrius

- 342 men arrested, all nationalist suspects.
- Few actual IRA members detained, many had already fled.
- Internment sparked riots and further violence.
- 7,000 Catholics fled their homes.
- By the end of 1971, 2,000 Catholics had been arrested, but fewer than 100 loyalists.
- Reports emerged of torture and mistreatment of prisoners.
- Internment increased support for the IRA.

6. Bloody Sunday (30 January 1972)

Civil Rights March in Derry

- NICRA planned a peaceful march against internment.
- British Army (Parachute Regiment) opened fire on protesters.
- 26 civilians shot; 14 died.
- The British Army claimed they had been fired upon, but no evidence supported this.
- The Widgery Report (April 1972) cleared the soldiers of wrongdoing, causing nationalist outrage.
- The 2010 Saville Report found the shootings were unjustified.
- British PM David Cameron apologised in 2010, calling it “unjustifiable”.

Impact of Bloody Sunday

- IRA recruitment soared.
- 500 people were killed in 1972, the bloodiest year of the Troubles.
- British Embassy in Dublin burned down by protesters.

7. The Collapse of Stormont and Direct Rule (March 1972)

Escalating Violence

- By March 1972, violence was out of control.
- Loyalists and republicans intensified bombings and killings.
- British government blamed Stormont for failing to restore order.

Heath's Decision to Suspend Stormont

- 21 March 1972: PM Edward Heath proposed direct rule from Westminster.
- Brian Faulkner refused and resigned.
- 28 March 1972: Stormont suspended; direct rule introduced.
- Unionists viewed this as the end of Protestant rule.
- The IRA saw it as a step toward British withdrawal.

Conclusion

- The Troubles escalated between 1969 and 1972, with sectarian violence worsening.
- British Army's initial deployment was welcomed by Catholics but later fuelled resentment.
- Internment and Bloody Sunday led to greater IRA support.
- Loyalist paramilitaries formed, leading to tit-for-tat violence.
- Direct rule from Westminster marked the end of unionist dominance at Stormont.

Key Terms

- **NICRA:** Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association.
- **Operation Banner:** British military operation in Northern Ireland.
- **Provisional IRA (PIRA):** Armed republican group formed in 1969.
- **Internment:** Imprisonment without trial, introduced in 1971.
- **Bloody Sunday (1972):** British Army killed 14 nationalist protesters.
- **Direct Rule:** British government took control of Northern Ireland in 1972.