

## **During the period 1949-1969, how successful was the government of Northern Ireland in responding to the problems caused by the economy and/or community relations?**

After World War II the Labour government in Britain introduced the Welfare state. The NHS was established, free education was introduced and increases occurred in pensions and welfare payments. The British government provided extra funding to the Stormont government to implement the Welfare state. Initially the Unionist government resisted implementing the Welfare state, fearing that it would benefit Catholics and threaten Unionist rule. When the Unionists eventually implemented the Welfare state it had a significant benefit to the economy and increased economic growth but made community relations worse leading to the civil rights movement marches. Northern Ireland wasn't successful in dealing with the problems created by the economy and community relations which helped to lead to the Troubles in 1969.

In the early economic period under Brookeborough who was prime minister in 1949. There was a decline of traditional industries. In 1950, shipbuilding, linen and agriculture were the main economic activities. After World War II, agriculture was Northern Ireland's largest industry it demanded on guaranteed prices and the British market. Output grew by 2% a year in the 1950s. By 1960, 14% of the Labour force was occupied in agriculture; it declined from 100,000 in 1945 to 73,000 in 1960 due to mechanisation and the elimination of small holdings, e.g. the number of tractors doubled in the 1950s due to the decline of traditional industries. The Northern economy suffered from remoteness from the main markets, higher transport costs and lack of domestic raw materials for industry. The linen industry remained strong up to the early 1950s. This was due to the demand after World War II and the Korean War in 7 years 25,000 jobs were lost due to competition from synthetic fibres such as rayon and terylene. Social and economic issues played a central role in people's lives, the underlying divisions between Unionists and Nationalists continued to dominate the political life of the province. The total number of Catholics compared to the religion and unemployment were high. In Belfast city total population of Catholics was 27.5% and for unemployment was 8.5%. In Antrim total population of Catholics was 24.4% and for unemployment was 6.7%. In Down the total population of Catholics was 28.6% and unemployment was 8.3%. In Londonderry the total population of Catholics was 42.4% and unemployment was 11.5%. In Derry the total population of Catholics was 67.1% and unemployment was 7.5%. In Tyrone total Catholic population was 54.8% and unemployment was 12.3%. In Fermanagh total Catholic population was 53.2% and unemployment was 9.8%. In Armagh the total population of Catholics was 47.3% and unemployment was 12.8%.

The economy of Northern Ireland recovered in the 1960s under the Industries Development Act. This act was published in 1965. Came in when Terence O'Neill was prime minister. As he wanted to improve the economy. O'Neill introduced policies by using reports and plans. The Benson Report (1963) proposed the modernisation of the railways. The Matthew Plan

(1964) proposed a new city between Portadown and Lurgan, (renamed Craigavon). The Wilson Plan in 1965 proposed a new ministry of development and new growth centres, mostly east of the Bann. New motorways, schools and houses were also built, and there was more manpower training. There was also a new university to be built in Coleraine. In the 1960s manufacturing grew faster in Northern Ireland than in the UK at 4%. Multinational companies such as Goodyear, Michelin and ICI were attracted to Northern Ireland. As 40,000 jobs were created. These new jobs were mainly attracted to Unionist areas.

Under Brookeborough there was no effort made improve community relations. The provisional IRA changed the nature of the Northern Ireland conflict from a clash of cultures to an attack on the British state in Northern Ireland. The Northern Ireland governments response to the IRA border campaign (1956-1962), with its imposition of internment helped to further divide the communities in the North. Between 1956 and 1962 the IRA engaged in a series of attacks on Northern Ireland from across the border in the Republic of Ireland. The most famous campaign took place on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1965 when 12 IRA men attacked the RUC barracks in Brookeborough. Two men were killed. The government took strict measures against it. Security was improved at the police barracks. The B-specials (part-time police) were called into action and internment without trial. As the campaign continued in 1961. In the general election of 1957 4 TDs were elected. They refused to their seats in the Dail as a result of the deaths of Fergal O'Hanlon and Sean South, 2 IRA men. On 26<sup>th</sup> February 1962 the IRA issued an official statement announcing the end of the border campaign. During the campaign, 12 IRA members and 6 RUC men were killed, over 32 of the security members were injured. Over 200 IRA members were convicted and sentenced for their role in the campaign. The Border Campaign didn't bring Irish unity any closer and helped rift between the two communities.

Under O'Neill efforts were made to improve relations between the two communities. On the 14<sup>th</sup> January 1965 O'Neill had a meeting with Sean Lemass in Belfast. They generally discussed uncontroversial topics such as the possibility of future co-operation in economic matters. The symbolism of the meeting was far more important and both leaders in public comments than more united the nations than divided. It was the first time as Prime Minister of Northern Ireland had met a Taoiseach of the Irish Republic. O'Neill returned Lemass's visit when he travelled to Dublin in February 1965. They took serious political risks in order to meet. O'Neill was afraid of the reaction of hard-line Unionists who wanted no contact with the Republic. As Sean Lemass was a long life republican as he fought in the IRA during the Civil War. Neither men told their respective cabinet or the press until the last minute to avoid negative reactions. In the South the meetings were welcomed and not very controversial except in the most radical of republican circles. Reaction in the North was more aggressive. The Rev. Ian Paisley was the most vocal. He handed in a letter of protest and accused him of being a dictator for not informing his cabinet. O'Neill's move for community reform would be affected by Unionist opposition.

However, the decision to locate the new university in Coleraine over Derry helped to create a massive divide between the two communities. Derry people were angry when word of this decision got out. In January 1965 a university for Derry Committee was set up. Its members

included Unionists and Nationalists. One of them was a young teacher John Hume. They organised protest meetings and met with O'Neill and his minister for education, Herbert Kirk. On 18<sup>th</sup> February 1965 the Unionist mayor of Derry and the Nationalist MP led a 2,000 strong motorcade to Stormont, while back in Derry pubs and shops closed in protest. The following day, O'Neill met secretly with leading Derry Unionists. They persuaded him to keep Magee open but it didn't press him to give the university to Derry. It seems they feared that it might draw new people, some of them Catholic into the city. That could upset the delicate balanced Unionist control of the city council. In the end O'Neill decided to put the new university in Coleraine, although he also decided to keep Magee open. The decision to locate the new university in Coleraine was a bad political decision. This angered Nationalists and they lost trust in O'Neill. Nationalists saw the decision as further proof that the rest of Northern Ireland was badly treated. They said this was in line with the Benson, Matthew and Wilson reports, which made proposals with either downgraded Derry or built up the area east of the Bann around Belfast. They said Coleraine was selected because it was a largely Protestant town. John Hume said the Coleraine University controversy was the spark that ignited the civil rights movement.

There was a poor and unbiased reaction to the demand of equal housing from NICRA combined with the attitude of the RUC and the inability of O'Neill to control the more radical Unionist elements of his own party. A civil rights movement march organised by CSJ and NICRA from Coalisland to Dungannon to highlight discrimination against Catholics. Marchers carried placards saying "one man, one house, one job" and "Jobs on Merit". It was the start of a campaign of non-violent civil disobedience. A civil Rights march in Derry in October 1968 was organised by NICRA. It was banned by William Craig, Minister for home affairs, when the Apprentice Boys said they would hold a march along the same route at the same time. The Civil Rights march went ahead; it was stopped by the police (RUC). An RTE news film showed police batoning marchers including Gerry Fitt and Eddie McAtter and using water cannons. Some Labour MPs were present and they were shocked by the police action. News was splashed around the World. Northern Ireland was seen as a police state. Harold Wilson, British Prime minister, was now forced to intervene more actively in Northern Ireland. He brought O'Neill, Craig and Brian Faulkner to London. He forced the Northern Ireland government to introduce a group of reforms. O'Neill introduced a group of reforms. O'Neill introduced a five-point programme of reform: He promised the introduction of a points system in the allocation of houses, the reform of local government elections, the repeal of parts of the Special Powers act and the suspension of Derry Corporation. O'Neill gave a television address in December 1968. He said "Ulster stands at the crossroads". He asked civil rights leaders to stop their demonstrations. He told Unionists that the British government would rule Northern Ireland directly from Westminster. Civil rights leaders agreed to end their demonstrations. But extreme Unionists, said O'Neill was selling out to Nationalists. O'Neill sacked Craig. There was a serious attack on the march by loyalists at Burntollet Bridge near Derry, where the marchers were not protected by the RUC. Thousands supported the marchers when they got to Derry. Anti-RUC riots broke out, and later the RUC attacked Catholics in the Bogside. Tensions increased. It marked the end of the Civil Rights movement period and started a serious conflict.

The battle of the Bogside started in August 1969 showed that the Northern Ireland government didn't manage community relationships. In fact, they made them worse. During the Battle of the Bogside, NICRA called on other areas to demonstrate to relieve the police pressure on the Bogside. There was rioting in Belfast. Catholics erected barricades there and Protestant mobs petrol bombed Catholic houses. Resulted in the burning out of 1,850 homes with 1,505 Catholic homes. The IRA had only old weapons; they were accused of running away and failing to defend the Catholic/Nationalist areas: IRA which meant "I ran away".

The Northern Ireland government wasn't successful with dealing with economic and community relationships. As there was a declining economy and a decline in traditional industries. As well as ongoing discrimination of Catholics which led to the development of the Civil Rights movement. Which made things worse as educated Catholics were no longer willing to accept discrimination. This led to the Battle of the Bogside which made community relations worse as issues couldn't be solved under the government. This led to the outbreak of the Troubles in 1969. There was no interest under Brookeborough and O'Neill was undermined by radical unionism.