

## **What were the challenges faced by Northern Ireland between 1920-1945 and how well did they react to those challenges?**

The Northern Irish state was established under the Government of Ireland Act 1920. The act was introduced by the British Prime Minister, Lloyd George, as a way of solving divisions between Nationalists and Unionists that emerged following the Ulster Crisis that followed the third Home Rule Bill in 1912. This act proposed the creation of two Home Rule governments in Belfast and Dublin. To which the Ulster Unionist party accepted and the Sinn Fein party rejected. Over the following years, the Northern Ireland government faced considerable amounts of social problems such as the establishment of law and order, sectarianism between Protestants and Catholics and a shortage of houses and economic problems such as the economic decline between the 1920s and the 1930s. In this essay, I'll be discussing just how the newly established government tackled these challenges.

A social problem in Northern Ireland was the establishment of law and order. Throughout the country the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was suppressed in 1920 to stop the IRA attacks. The Ulster Volunteer Force was revived under the leadership of Basil Brooke. Throughout the country the Irish republican Army (IRA) was suppressed in 1920 to stop the IRA attacks. The Ulster Volunteer Force was revived under the leadership of Basil Brooke. The Specials were a force of police officers that had been set up to support the Regular police. The Ulster Special Constabulary was established in 1920. The force was mainly composed of Protestants. There were three classes. Class A were full time policemen, Class B were part-time and Class C were unpaid reservists. Made up of mainly Ulster Volunteers. The A and C Specials were disbanded and the B Specials remained and were to be a major target for IRA attacks. In May 1922 the Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) was replaced by the Royal Ulster Constabulary. It was an armed police force with 3,000 members who established law and order. The use of the Special Power (Class A, Class B and Class C) were used to act to suppress Nationalist Republican activity. The Minister for Home Affairs was Richard Dawson Bates appointed by Craig. To deal with violent threats to the authority of the government and imposed the death penalty for throwing bombs and flogging for carrying weapons.

Sectarianism between Protestants and Catholics was another social challenge for the state. In 1923 Lord Londonderry Education Act made an effort to bridge the divide between the two religions. The intention was to create a non-denominational secondary school system. Religion was to be taught outside school hours. Catholic schools refused to participate as they saw it as an attack against their religion and as a result Catholic schools weren't funded. Protestant schools received more funding than Catholic schools. Protestant and Anglican schools, on the other hand, transferred their schools over to state control, and were refused. They received grants for heating, lightening and teachers' salaries. But through campaigns by church leaders and the Orange Order, the act was amended in 1930. Although the ministers had good intention with the act, it did nothing to bring the two communities together.

Another social problem in Northern Ireland during the Inter-war years was the serious shortage of houses. Between 1921 and 1939 only 8,000 houses were built by local

authorities. Likewise, between the 1920s and 1930s, the healthcare provision in the country was utterly inadequate, tuberculosis accounted for 46% those aged 15-25. Another social issue facing the state was the high level of unemployment. Over one-third of Belfast lived on the breadline. Dole payments low and many people had to fall back on the poor Law Workhouses. There were limited new resources that were set aside for the Unionists. These limited resources were only used to improve Unionist areas. During this time the state didn't have a specific department for health so their approach towards the problem was poor.

In 1914 the six counties in Northern Ireland were more economically advanced than the rest of Ireland, one of the main reasons for Unionist opposition to Home Rule was to claim that Ulster would suffer economically under parliament in Dublin's Rule. However, after a brief post World War I economic boom, the economy was damaged which created economic problems in Northern Ireland between the 1920s and 1930s. It was hit by a severe recession that crippled both the shipbuilding and textiles industry. Unemployment rose to around 25% and stubbornly stayed there for new vessels fell due to the surplus of merchant ships and Belfast's overseas customers developed their own shipbuilding industries. Changes in fashion lowered the demand for textiles. Women's dresses became shorter and petticoats weren't worn. The demand for linen to cover aircraft's wings steadily declined with the arrival of new all-metal aluminium designs. The state was forced to fall back on its agriculture sector. The type of work that was generally given to Unionists was industry and agriculture work.

Northern Ireland's economy prospered once again during World War II. In 1941 Britain could no longer produce enough war materials and re-located all war-related industries to the North of Ireland. The North's industries and farms contributed significantly to the war effort. Between 1939 and 1945, the factories of Northern Ireland produced 1,200 Stirling bombers, 125 Sunderland flying boats, 75 million artillery shells and 200 million yards of cloth. 140 warships and 123 merchant ships were built. Harland and Wolff produced tanks and aircraft parts. Shorts built 1,200 bomber planes. Similarly, the North's linen mills were bombed. They had orders for uniforms, tents and parachutes. Later in the war, American troops stationed in Northern Ireland, which also helped to boost employment.

Unemployment dropped below 5%, a dramatic reduction from the inter war period. Wages also increased. Unemployment fell from 70,000 in 1941 to 10,000 in 1944. The agriculture sector supplied food to the British market and there were guaranteed prices for farm produce and production as a result increased to help ease food shortages. Compulsory tillage orders increased to acreage under tillage as more of the major crops were produced such as flax, oats and potatoes. The economy benefitted greatly from World War II in Northern Ireland.

There was a major social impact in Northern Ireland during the war were the bombing raids in 1941. Belfast was bombed four times. The first attack was the Docks Raid which happened on 7<sup>th</sup> April 1941, by 7 German bombers. 13 people were killed and there were fires in the city. The second happened on 15<sup>th</sup> April called the Easter Raid. Belfast was attacked for 5 hours by 180 aircrafts as the anti-aircraft's guns stopped firing. The bombers

missed the docks and bombed mainly the working-class areas. 900 people were killed and around 600 were seriously injured. Public baths were used to lay out the bodies for identification. The Northern Government requested fire brigades from the South which came from Dublin. This impressed the Northern Unionists but this endangered Irish neutrality. After this people left the city for fear of attack. Some left for the South of Ireland, others left the city each night for the suburbs and the countryside often called the "ditchers". The bombings revealed the terrible slum conditions showing poverty of working-class families as well as the evacuations. This influenced the development of the Welfare State after the war. There were two further raids in May 1941. In the Fire raid which happened between 4th May to 5th May, incendiary and highly explosive bombs were dropped on the harbour and on Harland and Wolff. Harland and Wolff were out of production for six months. Almost 200 people were killed. Two bombers did very little damage in the Fourth Raid which happened between 5th May to 6<sup>th</sup> May but 14 people were killed. In all the attacks 1,100 people were killed. Half the houses in the city were destroyed about 100,000 people were made temporarily homeless. In 1943 Basil Brooke replaced Andrews as Prime Minister due to the government being criticised of its poor defence preparations during the war. Under his leadership Nationalist politicians were again kept out of the government. There was tension between the Unionist and Nationalist communities over the North's involvement in the war, despite both communities sharing the same benefits and hardships during those years. Also created a sense of solidarity with the people of Britain and further widened the gap between the North and South, notwithstanding De Valera's support for Belfast during the raids of 1941. Showing that the divide in politics between the Nationalists and Unionists continued and wasn't healed by the mutual suffering during the war. Social problems continued during the war.

In conclusion, Northern Ireland didn't successfully tackle its social pressures during the years 1920-1945. In fact, they were made worse due to Sectarianism. However, this was all down to their lack of surplus government funds. Without two World Wars, Northern Ireland's economy wouldn't have prospered as much as it did. Economically, they relied heavily on the industries that produced war material for their main source of income and this can be seen as a very negative aspect of their policies. If the government invested in other industries it would have been likely that they wouldn't have suffered a large economic depression after both World War I and World War II. All the different policies that happened ensured that there was an ever-growing divide between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.