THE SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF PARTITION

The subject of partition is a well-ploughed furrow in the historiography of modern Ireland. A contentious topic of contemporary relevance to the extent that it informs much of present-day political discourse, the division of the island into two distinct polities has generated widespread academic interest and produced an interpretatively and disciplinary diverse body of literature. The historical record remains incomplete. However, extant research on the partition of Ireland – its genesis, consequences and legacy – contains great explanatory value regarding the entrenchment of antagonistic identities and the conditions that gave rise to the decades of internecine conflict known as 'the Troubles'. To understand the significance of the border in shaping inter- and intra-community conflict, it is instructive to provide an outline of the various interpretations of partition and the key events that led to the formation and consolidation of the two states of Ireland.

Interpretations of partition and the Northern Ireland problem

In his excellent review of Ireland's historic relationship with Britain, Stephen Howe captures the difficulty of presenting a clearly defined typology of interpretations of the partition and the Irish national question (2000: 7-10). At the opposite ends of the spectrum lie 'external' and 'internal' explanations, which contest two main issues: the role of British 'imperialism' in Ireland to the present day; and the question of whether the island hosts two communities or two nations with separate rights to self-determination. These interpretations are well represented in accounts of the Troubles and continue to inform analyses of the Northern Ireland peace process and its fault lines.

Historically, orthodox republicans and nationalists have asserted that partition amounted to the unnatural, externally imposed division of the Irish nation by a British imperial state concerned with protecting its strategic and economic interests across the island, particularly in the north-east corner. Imperialism here is understood as a nationalistic form of politico-military domination, an unbroken series of foreign policy measures, as opposed to the transnational economic phenomenon explored by Kautsky, Lenin and their contemporaries in a specific era of rapid social, economic and political upheaval. For decades after the formation of the two states, the view of partition as a British imposition remained a central thread in mainstream republican

and northern nationalist thinking, supported by academic studies such as Edmund Curtis' *A History of Ireland* (1936) and Frank Gallagher's *The Indivisible Island* (1957). Indeed, Éamon de Valera and prominent statesmen such as Seán MacBride gained reputations for, amongst other things, using nationalist rhetoric as a political tool at key junctures in modern Irish history. Meanwhile, advancing a 'stageist' conception of the revolution, pro-republican Marxists of the Connolly Association variety argued against partition and Britain's continued presence in Ireland on the basis that it subverted Ireland's bourgeois-democratic transformation (Greaves, 1949; 1972) – the national revolution – and resulted in the island's underdevelopment (Jackson, 1947).

During the Troubles, the Provisional republican movement and a number of far left proponents (most notably Farrell, 1980) adopted the position that the northern state was both illegitimate and irreformable. By virtue of their direct and implicit support for the Unionist government, successive British administrations were held primarily responsible for Ireland's persistent ills. The panacea to these ills was often presented as Irish reunification, the expectation being that differences *within the Irish nation* would ultimately be resolved following British withdrawal from the six counties and, for some, the establishment of a socialist republic. Though averse to the Provisional IRA's armed struggle, constitutional 'green' nationalists such as Garret Fitzgerald and John Hume were also inclined to lament the existence and detrimental effects of the border. Both individuals placed great emphasis on all-island routes out of the conflict, and Fitzgerald (1972) famously complained that there had developed in his time a 'deeply rooted partition mentality' in the South. Nationalists, republicans and socialists have thus expressed resentment over the outworkings of partition, though the various groups have seldom aligned on specific political objectives or the means for achieving those objectives.

In modern scholarship, 'Britain's colonisation of Ireland, and desire at all costs to hang onto it' (Curtis, 1994: viii) is rarely invoked to explain partition and the Northern Ireland problem. By endorsing the Good Friday Agreement in 1998, nationalist Ireland gave recognition to an important internal dynamic: Ulster Unionism's claim to self-determination and the principle of consent. In his critical account of left republican politics, Sinn Féin intellectual Eoin Ó Broin argues that

Westminster's 'increasingly aggressive Imperial discourse' encouraged and consolidated an emerging Ulster Unionist identity during the Home Rule crisis. Crucially, though, he acknowledges the significance of northern Protestants' 'material and cultural' ties to Britain, and describes the Ulster Covenant as an 'autonomous and organic' expression of Ulster Unionism (2009: 83-84). Not all Sinn Féin representatives or supporters would concede these points so openly. Nor is the party leadership above playing the British imperialist trump card in dealing with the past or with political opponents of the present. In practice, however, Provisional republicanism has accepted that the most viable route to a united Ireland lies in persuading Unionists of its merits, thus leaving socialist and 'dissident' republican groups to pursue explicit anti-imperialist discourses.

One major turning point in the way many understood modern Ireland and its problems was the publication of Conor Cruise O'Brien's highly personal *States of Ireland* (1972), which took aim at the fundamental assumptions of Irish nationalism. O'Brien was one of the first to argue that the difficulties facing Ireland had their origins in the existence of two irreconcilable traditions, not in the actions of an external power. Notorious in republican circles for his crusade against Sinn Féin and the IRA, O'Brien also inverted nationalist logic with his bold claim that partition was in fact necessary to protect northern Protestants from the excesses of a Catholic-nationalist state and that the Dublin government's constitutional claim to Northern Ireland stood in the way of peace and progress. O'Brien's work was not grounded in extensive empirical research; it took on the form of thinly veiled political polemics. But as Howe notes, he 'anticipated, at least in passing, most major themes in subsequent discussion of the Northern Ireland problem' (2000: 87).

It was the outbreak of the Troubles, combined with the release of government archives and methodological advances in historical enquiry, which prompt greater consideration of internal relationships both within the island of Ireland and within the state of Northern Ireland. Patrick Buckland (1973) was the first to attempt a serious examination of Ulster Unionist identity using the wide range of contemporary archival sources available. Buckland's history from above reveals the ideological connection between an Ulster Protestant elite and Britain, but fails to penetrate the surface and

explain mass support for Ulster Unionism. This particular challenge is expertly addressed in Peter Gibbon's (1975) Marxist analysis of politics in Ulster during the nineteenth and early twentieth century. Gibbon highlights the interplay between social and economic forces, religion, ideology and politics over the course of a century and in doing so introduces an important superstructural dimension to conventional Marxist analyses of Unionism. Paying particular attention to the emergence of a dominant industrial bourgeoisie in the north-east, he traces how the Protestant working class and large numbers of the petit-bourgeoisie became gradually incorporated into a right-wing populist bloc that assumed the form of a nationalist political movement with claims to self-determination. Despite its focus on conceptualising Ulster Unionism at the expense of a thorough examination of primary sources, this text remains one of the most sophisticated treatments of Ulster Unionism and the historical backdrop to the Home Rule crisis.

Equally compelling is James Loughlin's exposition of organisational, party political forms of Ulster Unionism, its relationship with monarchy and imperialism, and the ambiguous nature of identity formation and expression. Placing Ulster Unionism in the broad context of a multi-faceted British national identity, Loughlin accepts that it emerged as a separate ethnic group with a distinctive culture. But he argues that it lacks the 'elementary condition' of nationhood: 'a subjective consciousness of itself as itself as a separate nation' (1995: 33). To support this argument, he describes the intricacies of 'Britishness' and the complex ways in which Unionists defined themselves between 1885 and 1914. The unenviable task of defining a singular British national identity is also a running theme in the work of Tom Hennessey, who accentuates the inclusiveness and hybridity of civic nationalism under the Union: 'It allowed for a multitude of identities to develop under its umbrella, providing for different interpretations of Britishness, all defined by their own environmental influence' (1998: xxi). For him, this constitutional arrangement accommodated nationalists and Irish Unionists alongside English, Welsh and Scottish identities. However, the divergent responses of Unionists and nationalists to the First World War served to exacerbate divisions on the island, and 'the rise of an ideology diametrically opposed to the Unionist concept of Irishness' (ibid: 200) – the Irish

republicanism of Easter 1916 – seriously undermined efforts to embed a civic nationalist compromise. Hence his central thesis that 'a conflict of national identity lies at the epicentre of the partition of Ireland' (ibid: xi).

Influenced by Lenin's conception of the state as the primary unit of analysis, the distinct analytical framework provided by the French Marxist philosopher Louis Althusser, the non-nationalist Marxist triumvirate of Bew, Gibbon and Patterson take issue with Connolly's 'economist' interpretation of Protestant working class allegiances. These authors diverge slightly from Hennessey's claim that the decisive rupture between nationalism and Unionism occurred between 1914, the onset of the war, and 1916, the Easter Rising: 'It was Ulster Unionist Council's mobilisation against Home Rule [in 1912/13] that crystallised the opposition between nationalist and anti-nationalist political forces' (1979: 5). At the same time, they agree that 'The real objections to unification come not from Britain, but from local Protestants' (ibid: 29). One of the most original features of this research is its elucidation of tensions within the Unionist bloc. By drawing attention to the class contradictions within Ulster Protestantism, the book undermines the nationalist assumption that Protestant workers are dupes of British imperialism and Unionist elite, bound by false consciousness (see also Patterson, 1980). And by documenting the struggle between a reactionary, populist wing of Unionism and a liberal-progressive, non-populist wing, it challenges the notion of a homogenous, sectarian Unionist regime. *The State in Northern Ireland* is a vital contribution to the historiography, one that does not allow the reader to escape with a complacent view of northern politics.

Not surprisingly, the writings produced by Bew et al., including a study of the southern political economy (Bew, Hazelkorn & Patterson, 1989), have provoked strong reactions from academics and political activists alike. A useful overview of the academic debate is provided by Robert Perry, who, in drawing on the full gamut of polemical and more tactful responses (2008a: 132-137), highlights a number of apparent weaknesses in Bew et al.'s analyses in particular and internalist explanations more generally: 1) the relative dearth of a discussion of the British state's role in shaping internal relations and creating/maintaining the conditions for division and conflict; 2) the problem of attaching a historically progressive role to the all-class

Protestant bloc in the North, which denotes its Catholic antithesis as inherently reactionary and thus deprives republicanism and Catholic labour politics of all progressive content; 3) the limitations of a methodological approach that relies solely upon state papers as evidence and ignores the advances achieved by such disciplines as oral history; and 4) the more contentious claim that these scholars are driven by a political agenda to legitimise the Union and are therefore apologists for British involvement in Ireland and Unionist misrule. Indeed, Perry sees enough in this fourth point to warrant an entire journal article (2008b) connecting the intellectual trajectory of Bew, Hazelkorn and Patterson to the political transition of the Official republican project with which they were involved in the 1980s.

Of the criticisms outlined above, the first is arguably the most convincing and most significant. By focusing primarily on internal relationships, the studies in question almost invariably presume a backdrop of stable British constitutional democracy, a British state with benign intentions and the effective detachment of British nationalism from Irish developments. As regard the second charge, the revisionist Marxists do attach to Unionism a historically progressive role insofar as the uneven development of capitalism in Ireland resulted in an industrialised north-east with the attendant social relations, including a strong industrial bourgeoisie and numerically significant industrial working class. They have also accepted that Lenin regarded the Easter Rising and Irish War of Independence as a manifestation of the international struggle between imperialism and ant-imperialism (Bew, Gibbon & Patterson, 1979: 25-29), and have taken steps to distinguish a progressive, modernising republicanism from its insular, conservative variant (Bew, Hazelkorn & Patterson, 1989; Patterson, 1997). These are significant concessions, made against specific Marxist criteria and with an appreciation of historical context.

Although they stop short of describing Ulster Unionism as a nation, Bew et al. are clearly indebted to the 'two nations' theory advanced by the British and Irish Communist Organisation (B&ICO, formerly the Irish Communist Organisation) in response to the 1968/69 crisis of the northern state. Representing a direct riposte to Connollyism and, in Swan's words, an 'attempt to find a basis for partition in the economic base of Ireland' (2005: 67), BICO publications rely heavily – almost wholly –

on the uneven development of capitalism and the abstract definition of nation outlined in Stalin's essay 'Marxism and the National Question'. The view that there exists a distinct Ulster Protestant national community is one that BICO shares with O'Brien (1972), Alvin Jackson (1989) and, to a certain degree, with the Scottish neo-Marxist Tom Nairn (1977). The key difference between Nairn's influential book and a number of B&ICO pamphlets (1969, 1970, 1971, 1975) is that the latter depart from the former's prediction of the 'break-up of Britain' in favour of advocating Northern Ireland's full integration into the British nation. Employing a framework of Unionist-progressive/nationalist-republican-reactionary binary opposites, BICO emphasises the merits of political union with Britain, painting the southern state as a conservative backwater and attributing the blame for Ireland's problems to Catholic-nationalist irredentism. At the height of the Troubles, this thesis gained currency amongst a number of groups whose allegiances would not ordinarily have resided with Stalin: Unionists and loyalists, critics of the IRA, southern radical opponents of bourgeois nationalism, and sections of the British left.

Whereas most internal explanations of partition and the Troubles see Britain as a neutral arbiter of a civil conflict, BICO's polemics with Connollyism produced 'a conception of imperialism as something that was *a priori* theoretically progressive and beneficent in the particular form of British rule in Ireland' (Morgan, 1980: 191). British imperialism is seen as progressive insofar as it is a catalyst for capitalist development in the colonial country, which, according to orthodox Marxism, is deemed a necessary prerequisite to socialism. This line of reasoning is problematic because it lends justification to the often duplicitous and aggressive behaviour of the British state in Ireland and is therefore reminiscent of the self-justified 'civilising' missions undertaken by the old empires in the non-European world.

We find a second problem with BICO's analysis in its unhelpful caricatures of the Ulster Protestant and Irish Catholic, whereby the former is portrayed as a moral, industrious and rational economic being – explaining industrialisation in the north-east – while his opposite number is exposed as immoral, lazy and irrational. This invocation of the Protestant work ethic not only distorts Ulster Protestant history and glosses over the historical divisions between Protestant denominations, but also does a

grave injustice to Irish Catholics. This line of reasoning led BICO to heap criticism on the Provisional IRA's armed campaign and dismiss the revolutionary content of socialist republicanism, while praising the Ulster Workers' Council (UWC) strike of 1974 (Workers' Association, 1974), which was enforced by loyalist paramilitaries and which precipitated the collapse of a power-sharing solution to the northern crisis.

As Swan has noted, BICO's pretention to non-nationalism obscures the fact that the Unionism it endorses is in fact a form of nationalism. Likewise, the Stalinist theory upon which BICO scholars base their analysis is in many ways nationalistic, the doctrine of Socialism in One Country being one notable example (2005: 66). Swan further argues that BICO conflates 'nation' with 'state' and refuses to acknowledge the challenges presented to its thesis by the UK's existence as a multinational state. Thus 'two nations' theory serves an instrumental purpose in terms of justifying partition and the formation of a northern Protestant state,

> but is dangerous for Unionism within Northern Ireland as it would tend to grant similar 'national' rights to Catholic Nationalists within Northern Ireland – or to undermine the very basis for Northern Ireland's existence (ibid: 67)

In short, this theory is beset by the same shortcomings as Unionism in that has failed to deal adequately with Northern Ireland's minority problem or reason against the secessionist demands of Catholics in the six counties.

Finally, in his highly influential book on Northern Ireland, John Whyte elaborates on the problems associated with BICO's focus on economic divergence at the expense of cultural factors. For Whyte, this leads to a major blind spot as regards the origins and resilience of Ulster Unionism:

> If economics outweighed culture, one might have expected the Protestant farmers west of the Bann, whose material interests were much closer to those of their Catholic neighbours than they were to the workers and industrialists of the Belfast area, to have been drawn to nationalist Ireland, but in fact they were quite as staunch unionists as any other Protestants in Ulster (1990: 191).

Falling into economic reductionism, BICO fails to match the works of Gibbon (1975) and Bew et al. (1979) for comprehensiveness. These texts represent a significant advance in understanding Ulster Unionism precisely because they account for the

interaction of superstructural factors with the economic base. It is impossible to make sense of ethno-national divisions within Ireland and the state of Northern Ireland without proper consideration of culture, religion and the role of ideology.

It is generally accepted that the Northern Ireland problem is one of antagonistic ethno-national identities. This widespread recognition is enshrined in the Good Friday Agreement. Yet, while 'two nations' theory continues to serve a political purpose for sections of Unionism, it has certainly lost its scholarly appeal. Even the most prominent BICO theorist, Brendan Clifford, has since reappraised his view of Irish nationalism and British imperialism to the point of a 180-degree u-turn. But in fact neither oversimplified categories of 'one nation' or 'two nations' will suffice in the medium to long term. Those clinging to rigid and exclusive notions of identity – 'invented traditions' (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983) or 'imagined communities' (Anderson, 1983) – open themselves up to charges of outdated thinking in an era of rapid social, political and economic change. This is borne out by the 2011 census results for Northern Ireland, which point to a much more complex reality of fluid, multiple and hybrid identities: British; Irish; Northern Irish; British and Irish; British and Northern Irish; British, Irish and Northern Irish; and 'other'. Future conflict transformation endeavours and any lasting settlement in favour of either the status quo or Irish reunification will necessarily involve accommodating these identities within as yet undetermined parameters.

A chronology of partition

It is possible to trace the demographics and geography of partition back to the Plantation of Ulster, which occurred over the course of the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Historically, the province had been relatively successful in resisting English invasion and control. However, organised colonisation and land confiscations, accompanied by brutal events such as the Cromwellian Wars, gradually diluted this resistance and placed the hitherto native Catholic majority in a minority to English and Scots Protestant settlers and their descendants. By 1901 Protestants represented just over 55 percent of the population of Ulster (Laffan, 1983: 2). This would appear to say something about the inevitability of partition. However, a close look at the 1911 census reveals the delicate sectarian balance affecting Ulster at the turn

of the century. Antrim and Down, which were subject to a longer and more intense process of colonisation, had Protestant populations of 79 and 68 percent respectively, while Armagh had a slimmer Protestant majority of 54 percent. In the counties of Tyrone, Fermanagh, Monaghan, Donegal and Cavan, Catholics outnumbered Protestants by varying margins, with the first two containing sizeable non-Catholic minorities and the latter three, minorities that were not insignificant. And while Derry County had a Protestant population of 58 percent, Catholics accounted for 56 percent of the population in the city of Derry (Rankin, 2005: 12). The fact that Protestants outnumbered Catholics in Ulster therefore fails to explain why partition cut across the provincial boundary, or why the state of Northern Ireland included two counties with Catholic majorities.

While instructive, the geographic and religious determinism of authors such as Heslinga (1962) leaves us with only a partial understanding of the border. To swallow this interpretation of partition whole would, as Howard notes, involve 'a huge leap from the asserted north-south contrasts' to the specific historical conditions out of which modern social and political conflicts have emerged (2006: 2). Indeed this framework of analysis 'mirrors the teleology of Irish 32-county nationalism' (ibid: 12), which views Irish unification through a primordial lens and sees reunification as the inevitable result of green demographic trends. It is therefore vitally important to examine the complex series of events that led to the formation and consolidation of the island's two states.

The introduction of Gladstone's abortive First Home Rule Bill in 1886 occurred against a backdrop of agrarian unrest (harnessed by the Land League), increased support for self-government, and electoral manoeuvring at Westminster. Both the Liberal Party and Conservatives had hitherto only briefly flirted with the idea of an Irish parliament in Dublin. However the general election of 1885, which followed an extension of the franchise, left Parnell's ascendant Irish Parliamentary Party (IPP) holding the balance of power with 86 MPs. The Liberal leader Gladstone underwent a conversion to Home Rule and cajoled Parnell into support for the formation of a Liberal government, while the Conservatives began looking in the direction of Irish and Liberal Unionists for reliable allies. In the event, the Orange Order provided the

most vocal opposition to the bill, and sectarian riots erupted in Belfast after loyalists reacted violently to what was perceived as apocalyptic change (Boyd, 1987: 140-172). But ultimately it was a failure of Gladstone's leadership and an unresolved split in the Liberal Party that sealed the bill's fate in the Commons. With some 93 Liberals voting against, the first attempt to deliver Home Rule was defeated by a margin of 341 to 311 (Jackson, 2003: 69-74).

This mini-crisis, which precipitated the collapse of the Liberal government and the formation of a Liberal Unionist Party, had a transformative effect on the Irish political landscape. It raised the stakes of Westminster's involvement in Irish affairs, strengthened the link between the IPP and Gladstone's Liberals, and saw the creation of a powerful Unionist lobby in the Conservative Party. One author goes as far to claim that the short-lived debate around the First Home Rule Bill 'revealed the gap between an evenly-divided Ulster and the other three provinces which, at least in terms of their MPs, were unanimously in favour of Home Rule' (Laffan, 1983: 11). While it may be true that opposition to Home Rule was concentrated in Ulster, the fact remains that the IPP held seventeen of the province's thirty-three seats. The overarching objectives of the Home Rule movement were vague and the Irish Party, as it was known colloquially, was bitterly divided on Parnell's leadership. Yet the majority of nationalist opinion, and Irish opinion for that matter, could be rallied around the minimum demand of limited self-government. By contrast, Ulster Unionism was ill-defined and lacking formal political expression beyond the confines of the Orange Order.

Following a period of Tory government, Gladstone returned to office in 1892 and wasted no time in introducing the Second Home Rule Bill (1893). The intervening years had seen the demise and death of Parnell, which left the Irish Party bitterly divided, and the formation of the Irish Unionist Alliance, an anti-Home Rule party that enjoyed strong support in the House of Lords. On this occasion, Gladstone's Liberals and the divided Home Rulers managed to push the bill through the Commons, only to see it comprehensively defeated by the Lords. Meanwhile, under the guidance of William O'Brien MP and Michael Davitt, the United Irish League (UIL) propelled the land question to the forefront of Irish nationalist politics. The IPP reconstituted under the leadership of John Redmond, who represented the respectable

business and landowning class, and assimilated the UIL's 100,000 members in the interest of pursuing the dual aims of self-government and radical land reform (Kostick, 1996: 9-10). Building on the achievements of the Land Acts of 1885 and 1887, the Wyndham Land (Purchase) Act of 1903 resolved the longstanding problem of landlordism in favour of tenant land purchase. These changes helped to broaden the support base of Redmondism and gave the Catholic farming class a greater say in the political arena.

The year 1905 holds retrospective significance for the emergence of two political forces that would shape debates around the national question and the dynamics of partition for generations. Concerned by the 'organisational decay' of Irish Unionism, the prospect of being betrayed by a Liberal government on the Home Rule question, and the threat posed by both nationalism and the Independent Orange Order, the Ulster Unionist Council (UUC) was formed by a group of Ulster MPs intent on giving Unionism a distinctly northern orientation, characterised by a 'militant and sectarian ethnic politics' (Walker, 2004: 22-24). The UUC drew support from the Orange Order, Liberal Unionists and Conservatives, industrialists and farmers, and the landed gentry; labour representation would come later, but members of the Council would continue to speak for Protestant workers in spite of social conflict in Belfast. Founded in the same year, Sinn Féin provided an outlet for the growing Catholic middle class and petit bourgeoisie. Tied to the Gaelic Revival, the Irish Republican Brotherhood (IRB) and opposition to the Boer War, the party opposed Irish participation in the British parliament and reintroduced a radical separatist strand to Irish nationalism. The appearance of these two political forces only appeared vindicated when the Home Rule question re-emerged in 1910 'as a by-product of the long quarrel between the two houses of parliament' (Laffan, 1983: 16).

The Parliament Act of 1911 reduced the House of Lords' veto to a delaying power and, as a reward for the cooperation of Redmond's IPP in the Commons, the Liberal government introduced the Third Home Rule Bill in April 1912. On the basis of 1911 census results, a Liberal backbencher proposed excluding the counties of Antrim, Armagh, Down and Derry. Despite expressing preference for a solution that did not involve partition, Edward Carson, the Dublin-born barrister and ascendant Unionist

leader, put forward an amendment to exclude all of Ulster's nine counties. Neither proposal garnered much support, meaning that three passages through parliament would have seen the bill enacted into law (Rankin, 2005: 12-14). There was little reason for Redmond or his supporters to doubt the inevitability of Home Rule. A major challenge facing the notoriously weak British Prime Minister Herbert Asquith was the growth of Ulster Protestant opposition to Irish semi-autonomy, plus the 'bitterness' and 'ferocity' with which senior Tory figures were using Ulster Unionism as an extra-parliamentary battering ram against the Liberals (Laffan, 1983: 17). These pressures and the expediencies of an empire at war would ultimately see Asquith 'pressed towards an implicit acceptance' of some form of partition and Redmond towards his 'eventual acquiescence that Ulster counties be allowed to opt out of Home Rule on an individual basis, for six years – a concession that pleased nobody' (Foster, 1988: 466).

Encouraged by Carson and James Craig, some 450,000 men and women added their signatures the Ulster Covenant in September 1912, thus giving formal expression to genuine northern Protestant fears of 'Rome rule' from Dublin. This was followed in early 1913 by the formation of the Ulster Volunteers, or Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), an armed paramilitary outfit led by Carson and pledged to oppose Home Rule with violence if necessary. The UVF availed of advice offered by senior British military figures, while the Tory opposition leader Andrew Bonar Law made explicit his support for Ulster's 'right' to resist the government (Laffan, 1983: 28). Arming and training the UVF continued throughout the year, prompting nationalists to launch an imitation force in the form of the Irish Volunteers. The Volunteers encompassed an influential IRB faction, but Redmond supporters constituted the rank-and-file majority and the IRB leadership saw little traction in opposing Redmond so soon after the Home Rule Bill had made its successful journey through the Commons – that is, until Redmond urged his followers to enlist in the British Army and fight on behalf of the Empire. The differences between the UVF and Irish Volunteers were stark: the former was well drilled and had success in landing shipments of rifles and ammunition from Germany; they did not see arms until August 1914 and gained little exposure to proper military training. These weaknesses would see Britain take the empty threats of nationalist

Ireland less seriously than the more substantial ones of Unionist Ulster (Lee, 1989: 18-22).

Punctuating these crucial events was the Curragh Mutiny of March 1914, whereby the majority of officers based at the main British Army base in Ireland, the Curragh Camp in County Kildare, declared amidst rumours of a move against the UVF that they would not be prepared to force Home Rule on their compatriots in Ulster. This coincided with an abortive effort by the government to reach a compromise between Redmond and Carson on the contested counties of Ulster. In practice, the government's failure to confront the dissenting officers enabled the UVF to land arms shipments unopposed (Coogan, 2002: 19). In the estimation of one historian of Ulster Unionism, this episode 'badly damaged the government's credibility' and provided a strong indication that Asquith 'could not with any certainty count on the army in any eventual confrontation with Ulster' (Walker, 2004: 37)

Despite being taken to task for his 'economist' analysis of the north-east (see, for example, Bew, Gibbon & Patterson, 1979: 7-9), the Edinburgh-born Irish socialist James Connolly produced some of his most perceptive writings in response to the mobilisation of the UVF and the Curragh Mutiny. Whether Connolly viewed these events, in Gramscian terms, as a 'clash of traditional intellectuals [the Orange Order, landed gentry and British officer class] with those organic intellectuals [parliamentary liberals] representing the emerging bourgeoisie in Britain and Ireland' (Thompson, 2003: 375) is questionable. What is clear, however, is that he brought to light a subversion of *British* parliamentary democracy and exposed the contradictory nature of the government's approach to Irish affairs. The IPP greatly outnumbered Irish/Ulster Unionists at Westminster, and yet thirty years of peaceful agitation for Home Rule had failed to bear fruit. Whereas the British government had no qualms about crushing anti-colonial nationalism and the activities of the labour movement, it rewarded Unionist threats of civil war with a veto on Ireland's constitutional future (Connolly, 1975: 58-66). Patterson therefore does a disservice to Connolly's 1913/14 writings by claiming that he was prepared to countenance a British 'imperialist' army crushing Protestant working-class resistance (1980: 87).

At the outbreak of the war, Asquith placed the Home Rule Bill on the statute book and indicated that Irish self-government would eventually follow. This ambiguous pledge was enough to secure Redmond's support for the British war effort, though the response of nationalist Ireland was generally one of apathy. The carrot used to retain Carson's loyalty was an equally vague provision for Ulster as part of any solution to the Home Rule question. European war therefore delayed the onset of a civil war, though the decision of Eoin MacNeill and approximately 13,000 of his followers to repudiate Redmond and ally themselves with the IRB appeared to raise the possibility of radical nationalism charting its own course (Lee, 1989: 23-24). Unionist nationalism, meanwhile, had undergone fundamental changes and now represented something very different than it had during the first Home Rule crisis.

The dramatic effects of the war and Easter Rising on the politics of the island are well documented. What differs in the literature is the weight attached to the Rising as a catalyst for division. It is difficult to argue with Rankin's assessment of the 1916 revolt and its aftermath:

> It helped transform home rulers into separatists, compelled the British government to realise that Ireland could not simply be ignored, and supplied a simple contrast which unionists were happy to demonstrate between loyal Ulster and disloyal Ireland (2005: 15).

Sinn Féin, Labour and the faltering IPP all vied for leadership of the 1918 general strike that defeated conscription, but it was the former that triumphed in peacetime general election of that year. Building on by-election victories the previous year, Sinn Féin won seventy-three of the total 105 seats, several uncontested in the absence of Labour candidates. This reduced the IPP to only six seats, of which five were in Ulster. Most significantly, the election handed the separatists an overall majority of Irish MPs and enabled Sinn Féin to relate its main political objective to the self-determination of nations such as Belgium, Czechoslovakia, Luxemburg, Poland and Alsace-Lorraine, whose fates the great powers were discussing at Versailles.

Denied representation at the post-war international negotiating table, Sinn Féin proceeded in forming Dáil Éireann in early 1919 while the IRA launched an armed insurgency against Crown forces in Ireland. The party had not requested a mandate

for the use of violence during the general election, but its close association with the events of 1916 enabled the IRA to carry out its campaign with implicit popular support. At the same time, the British coalition government set about negotiating the partition of Ireland with the Unionists, who now held majority of Ulster MPs and were in a strong position at Westminster in the light of Sinn Féin's abstentionism. David Lloyd George's cabinet considered excluding all nine Ulster counties from Home Rule arrangements, but faced strong opposition from Craig and his Ulster Unionist colleagues who wished to inherit a secure 2:1 majority in the six counties (Laffan, 1983: 61-71). Thus 'salvaging a feasible Ulster exclusion became the objective rather than a tactic' of Unionists and the British government, and the most serious discussions of 1919 and 1920 centred on 'how a "statutory Ulster" could be delimited' (Rankin, 2007: 913). In other words, finding a solution to the Ulster problem began to take precedence over the age old Irish national question.

The Government of Ireland Act (1920), 'essentially constructed to solve the Irish problem as it stood in 1914, not 1920' (Foster, 1988: 503), was enacted without the support of Sinn Féin or the Ulster Unionists, whose abstention from the vote conceded that achieving a secure majority in the proposed six-county northern administration would necessarily involve forsaking the Protestants of Cavan, Donegal and Monaghan (Gwynn, 1950: 188-191). Nor were the people of Ireland granted a plebiscite to decide their fate, despite the war's victors employing the mechanism in response to separatist demands and the contestation of borders across Europe. Indeed, the British government was presiding over a plebiscite in Schleswig-Holstein, the northernmost province of Germany, at the same time it was refusing to afford Ireland the same luxury. It was also during these immediate post-war years that Britain and France carved up the Middle East. In a divide and rule arrangement that saw the creation of Syria, Lebanon, the mandate territory of Palestine, Transjordan, Iraq and Kuwait, certain nationalities and ethnic minorities were treated more favourably in the interest of protecting the two empires' concerns in the region. What is the significance of this 'strategic and selective response' by the great powers to demands for national self-determination? According to Anderson and O'Dowd, it militates against the simple view that the British government's use of partition as an 'internal' solution to the Irish

crisis can be easily disentangled from its imperial calculations (2005: 11-14). Hence, these authors provide a corrective to overly insular analyses by restoring imperialism to conceptions of British nationalism and to explanations of partition.

Article 12 of the Anglo-Irish Treaty, signed by representatives of the British government and the de jure Irish Republic in December 1921, enabled Northern Ireland to opt out of the Irish Free State and set up a Boundary Commission to determine the final position of the border in the absence of a negotiated settlement. Having narrowly secured the support of Dáil for the Treaty, ushering in a brutal civil war in the South, Michael Collins entered into discussions with James Craig on the border and the possibilities for cross-border cooperation. In the event, two main factors proved the undoing of the Collins-Craig Pact: the existence of an unbridgeable gap between the two parties' territorial expectations (Rankin, 2005: 19); and the continuation – indeed escalation – of violence in the North. The IRA's sporadic and disorganised Ulster campaign of 1920-1922, which enjoyed Collins' ambiguous support, was met with repression by the Unionist state. Catholic civilians bore the brunt of the reprisals meted out by the B Specials, a paramilitary security force drawn exclusively from remnants of the UVF (Farrell, 1983). At the same time, in an environment shaped by recession and the inflammatory behaviour of the Unionist elite, sectarian conflict erupted in Belfast, beginning in July 1920 with the mass expulsion of Catholics and 'rotten Prods' from the shipyards. Over the next two years, the city would see 453 deaths, 7,500 expulsions and 5,000 evictions from homes, with the majority of victims Catholics (Kostick, 1996: 153-160; Patterson, 2006: 3). Amidst the violence plaguing both embryonic states, Craig signalled his intention to consolidate a six-county state with a 2:1 Protestant majority by refusing to acknowledge the role of, or appoint a representative to, the Boundary Commission. Lying dormant until 1925, the Commission eventually ended in what Foster describes as 'fiasco', leaving the border intact on the questionable basis of Northern Ireland's de facto existence (1988: 527).

Partition therefore spawned two states within a territorial framework that exists to this day. Both Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State were born into violence and political uncertainty, and neither reflected the aspirations of the island's population at the turn of the century. In the South, politics would now be

characterised by an incongruous process of state-building in competition with the notion of an incomplete social and national revolution. The leaders of Ulster Unionism, meanwhile, moved to further entrench the arrangements of partition on its terms, jettisoning the prospect of nationalist integration into the new state. Thus the North would quickly come to represent 'a "cage" for two communal blocs locked into a mutually antagonistic and self-reproducing relationship with each other' (Anderson & O'Dowd, 2007: 947).

Labour, partition and the long revolutionary period, 1907-1923

Warning against the consequences of dividing the island territorially, Connolly famously and quite accurately predicted that partition 'would mean a carnival of reaction both North and South, would set back the wheels of progress, would destroy the oncoming unity of the Irish labour movement and paralyse all advanced movements whilst it endured' (1975: 53). Of course, this schism was not at all predestined. Accompanying the events that led to partition and the entrenchment of sectarian strife in the North were instances of *social* conflict and large-scale mobilisations of the working class. Even as the dust began to settle on the border, organised labour continued to complicate the competing narratives of opposing national movements by exposing the full extent of class divisions within and across those respective blocs.

In 1907, the Liverpool-born trade unionist Jim Larkin arrived in Belfast to organise a strike of the city's dock workers, employed by the tobacco and steamship magnate Thomas Gallaher, and to recruit their large numbers into the National Union of Dock Labourers (NUDL). This dispute was characterised by sympathetic action (particularly on the part of the carters), a Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) mutiny in support of strike action, and by relative unity between Catholic and Protestant workers – one of the standout achievements of Larkin's efforts in Belfast. The striking workers also won the support of the Independent Orange Order, a labourist alternative to the mainstream Orangeism rooted in populist opposition to the Unionist elite. Ultimately, the NUDL leader James Sexton agreed to end the strike on what amounted to unfavourable terms for the workers involved, despite Larkin's protestations. This convinced Larkin of the merits of establishing an Irish-based trade

union, characterised by syndicalist methods and free from the restraints of the British labour leadership. It also convinced him of the necessity of organising skilled and unskilled workers together through industrial unionism and under the banner of 'one big union', thus achieving strength in numbers and greater levels of solidarity. In short, the Belfast dock strike helped revive 'new unionism' in Ireland (Gray, 1985).

In one author's estimation, the Irish Transport and General Workers' Union (ITGWU) set out at its inception in 1909 to 'decolonise labour consciousness, arguing that Irish workers should rely on their own resources and build a movement geared to tackling native conditions' (2011: 76). One would be forgiven for viewing the 1913 Dublin Lockout as a high point nadir of the ITGWU's influence. Indeed the Lockout carried great significance in terms of the right of workers to organise and made a lasting imprint on the collective consciousness of the Irish labour movement (Yeates, 2000). Beyond that, however, Larkin's union and its members continued to have a significant impact on Irish industrial relations and political developments into what is commonly referred to as the Irish revolutionary period, 1917-1923 (Greaves, 1982; O'Connor, 1988). In 1916, membership of the Transport Union stood at 5,000, but rose to 12,000 in 1917 and 68,000 in 1918 (including 20,000 farm labourers), reaching a peak of 100,000 in 1920. Naturally, the number of affiliates to the Irish Trades Union Congress also increased over a similar period, from under 100,000 in 1916 to around 300,000 in 1921 (Kostick, 1996: 32, 139). Overcoming the deleterious effects of the Lockout, the war and Easter 1916, the Irish labour movement effected a recovery during the most active phase of the IRA's War of Independence campaign.

Returning to Ireland after becoming acquainted with the syndicalism of Daniel de Leon's Socialist Labor Party (SLP) and the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW, or the 'Wobblies') in the US, Connolly was the driving force behind the foundation of an Irish Trades Union Congress and Labour Party (ITUCLP) in 1912. At this time, Connolly envisaged the imminent achievement of Irish self-government and convinced most of his contemporaries of the necessity of developing independent Irish labour structures, with the Labour Party playing a complementary, educational role to trade union radicalism. This view was confirmed by the British trade union leadership's reluctance to lend full support to the workers of Dublin in 1913. Only in

the north-east did Connolly's ideas encounter significant opposition, principally from the supporters of William Walker's 'gas and water' Fabianism. Despite his laudable efforts as the ITGWU's Belfast organiser in 1911, Connolly's ill-timed polemic with Walker served to highlight divisions between his Irish labour outlook and those who remained loyal to the British labour movement (Connolly & Walker, 1974). Ultimately, however, only one of the Independent Labour Party (ILP)'s five Belfast branches opted out of the newly formed Irish Labour Party (O'Connor, 2011: 90).

Prior to the war, Connolly's opposition to partition was broadly representative of labour opinion on the island. For instance, at its annual conference in June 1914, Congress delegates rejected the prospect of partition by 84-2 votes, with the votes of eight delegates unrecorded. Those in attendance included twenty Belfast delegates and four from Britain (ibid: 96). In 1918, the Irish Labour Party declared in favour of self-determination and subsequently fell in behind Sinn Féin on the national question. De Valera perhaps never used the words 'labour must wait, but that is what Labour effectively agreed to by reaching the fateful decision not to contest the general election that year. It is important to note that this decision was reached in the context of rising labour consciousness across Ireland, including in Belfast where there were signs of workers gravitating towards non-Unionist radical socialists. Popular individuals steeped in an independent labour tradition, for example Sam Kyle of the Shankill Road, contested the election and made a notable impression on the working class population. This trend continued into the 1920 local elections, where labourist candidates won twelve of the sixty seats on Belfast Corporation. Remarkably, despite his pronouncements in favour of Irish national self-determination, Kyle topped the poll on the Shankill Road with 2,082 votes. Islandwide, Labour won a total of 394 local council seats, compared with 550 seats for Sinn Féin and 355 for the Unionist Party. It is therefore difficult to avoid the conclusion that Labour made an error in abstaining from the 1918 general election, even if the northern Protestant working class drift away from Unionism did not necessarily favour the ITUCLP. The conditions were ripe for radical political action by the labour movement (Grant, 2012: 83-105).

The rise of syndicalism in Ireland was characterised by a marked increase in the number of trades councils (which now styled themselves 'workers' councils),

unionisation of unskilled workers and agricultural labourers and the growing attraction of industrial unionism. Additionally, it marked the return of sympathetic action and militant tactics during local disputes, extending to general action on a number of occasions (O'Connor, 2011: 103-109). In 1918, workers in nationalist Ireland successfully mobilised against the attempted enforcement of conscription in a general strike underpinned by political and economic motives (Kostick, 1996: 33-40). That same year, Carson and Richard Dawson Bates launched the Ulster Unionist Labour Association (UULA). Initially conceived as a Unionist variant of 'new unionism', the UULA fell under the control of the UUC and was ultimately consumed by the task of 'sound[ing] a counter-revolutionary alarm to "loyal workers" against the twin threats of socialism and republicanism' (Bew, Gibbon & Patterson, 1979: 48). However, this failed to prevent one of the most significant events of 1919: an unofficial strike of over 20,000 engineers and shipyard workers for a pay rise, which soon involved the transport workers, led to the formation of a general strike committee and took on all the characteristics of a 'soviet'. The May Day march of 1919 drew a crowd of over 100,000 people and Belfast briefly emulated the example of 'Red Clydeside' (Kostick, 1996: 51-69). Between 1917 and 1923, Ireland witnessed hundreds of soviets, most notably in Limerick (Cahill, 1990) and other parts of Munster. Despite falling short of a full-blown social revolution, the 'Irish revolutionary period' is certainly deserving of its characterisation as such.

It remains to mention briefly the phenomenon of socialist republicanism and the influence of international communism in 1917-1923 and post-partition Ireland. Conventional accounts of socialist republicanism have focused on the initiatives of anti-Treaty republicans such as Liam Mellows, Peadar O'Donnell, George Gilmore and Frank Ryan, all representatives of Connollyism or a broader Fenian tradition. Here, socialist republican ideas are described as originating from the IRA left, often as a response to military defeat (English, 1994; Ó Broin, 2009: 113-140; Patterson, 1997: 13-79). These authors shine a spotlight on socialist thinking emerging from within republicanism, but fail to address the socialist republican impulses of the labour movement. Labour historians Emmet O'Connor (2005) and Adrian Grant (2012) have taken important steps towards filling this major lacuna in Irish historiography, paying

specific attention to the socialist republicanism embodied by Larkin and the ITGWU, the tensions within Labour during the revolutionary period, and the impact of communism on the IRA between 1922/23 and the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War in 1936. O'Connor's (2004) groundbreaking research on Ireland's connection with the Communist International, 1919-1943, is particularly enlightening. He documents the fascinating attempts at communist organisation in the 1920s and 1930s, explains how communist ideas permeated various aspects of Irish society, North and South, and appraises the relative successes and failures of Comintern involvement in Ireland. He also reveals the full extent of cooperation and cross-pollination between communists and the republican movement, including de Valera's brief association with the Bolsheviks. Cumulatively, these texts underline the complex nature of republicanism in early twentieth century Ireland and help to elucidate the class dynamics of the Treaty split, which subsequently fed into post-partition conceptions of 'the republic'.

Counter-revolution and state consolidation

A number of Marxist historians (for example, Bew, Hazelkorn & Patterson, 1989: 26-33) have identified that specific class interests invested heavily in the Treaty settlement and the continuation of Ireland's dependent relationship with Britain. Not surprisingly, the radicalism of 1917-1923 was met with a counter-revolution characterised by repression, a reassertion of Catholic social conservatism and the rolling back of local and national democracy, cloaked by a carefully crafted Treatyite discourse under Cumann na nGaedheal in particular (Regan, 1999). In the Free State, politicians and policymakers fostered the development of a unique type of rentier capitalism to the benefit of graziers and livestock exporters (McCabe, 2011). North of the border, the landed gentry and industrial bourgeoisie in government set about securing Unionist dominance in the economy and the political structures. Northern Ireland displayed some of the traits of a 'normal' bourgeois state. The notorious Special Powers Act (1922) was used liberally against suspected republicans and 'subversive' labour activists of all hues, and the dominant 'populist' wing of Unionism was occasionally challenged by its 'anti-populist' liberal wing. However, the North departed from the norms of a functioning bourgeois democracy in many other ways, namely the persistence of sectarianism, the evidence of religious discrimination at an

institutional level, and the use of electoral gerrymandering to guarantee Unionist control of local councils in nationalist areas (Bew, Gibbon & Patterson, 1979; Farrell, 1980). In effect, partition gave birth to two reactionary states on the defensive.

Despite, and partly because of, Fianna Fáil's strong pronouncements on the national question, partition became further entrenched as the 1930s wore on. De Valera succeeded in dismantling specific aspects of the Treaty, while Articles 2 & 3 of Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland, 1937) laid claim to the whole territory of Ireland. Yet the South remained part of Britain's 'informal empire' (Cronin, 2000) and irredentism, whether of the Fianna Fáil or militarist republican type, appeared to render Irish reunification less, not more, likely in the short to medium term. The main effect of the Second World War was to reinforce opposing national identities and widen the gulf between North and South, culturally, economically and politically. Begrudgingly, the Stormont administration passed a series of bills that introduced the welfare state to Northern Ireland in piecemeal fashion, improving the living standards of its inhabitants and enabling the Unionist elite to present its benefits as 'fruits of the British connection' (Bew, Gibbon & Patterson, 2002: 86-99). This was particularly effective while Éire continued to suffer what is generally described in the literature as economic 'stagnation' or 'malaise'. The crude anti-partitionism of mainstream nationalism in the immediate post-war period proved incapable of addressing these realities (Lynn, 2005).

By sleight of hand, and much to the displeasure of his governmental colleagues, the Fine Gael Taoiseach John A. Costello took the opportunity whilst on a speaking tour of Canada to announce the Republic of Ireland Act (1948), which proposed to repeal the External Relations Act of 1936, withdraw Éire from the Commonwealth and declare a republic. Here, Costello cunningly stole a march on de Valera and constitutional republicans such as Seán MacBride, a Clann na Poblachta minister in the inter-party government. With this, the twenty-six counties finally secured political independence. What followed, however, consolidated Northern Ireland's position within the UK and made it easier for future British governments to fall in behind the Unionist regime. Under pressure from Basil Brooke, the Northern Ireland Prime Minister, and wary of a Conservative intervention on the matter, British Labour

responded sympathetically to Unionist concerns, culminating in the publication of the Ireland Bill on 3 May 1949. Passed the following month, the Ireland Act affirmed that 'in no event will Northern Ireland or any part thereof cease to be part…of the United Kingdom without the consent of the Parliament of Northern Ireland' (Lee, 1989: 300). Partition was therefore copper-fastened with added legal protection for the political aspirations of Ulster Unionism, but also with an abdication of Britain's responsibility for the Northern Ireland problem.

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