

## Prods, Papists and Partition - A Potted History of Ireland

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### Plantation

During Tudor times Ireland assumed strategic importance to Britain. Although there had been previous attempts to colonise Ireland, clan rule had on the whole triumphed. Henry VIII declared Ireland subject to British law and the colonisation was attempted on the same basis as that of America, plantation. The land was expropriated from its inhabitants and sold to under-takers who were bound to let it to English colonists. This was pretty much a failure, mainly due to strong clan resistance and only in Ulster was there any success after clan rebellion was crushed by mainly scottish (but some english) protestant colonists.

By the middle of the 17th century Ireland was divided between warring catholic and protestant landlords as part of the English Civil War, protestants were parliamentarians, the catholics royalist. In 1649 Cromwell successfully invaded and as a result many thousands of peasants were slaughtered and many thousands were taken as slaves for the West Indies. Land was taken from the catholic landlords and given to rounheads and protestant adventurers by way of reward for their services. Peasants were left only enough to subsist on as the protestant, mainly absentee, landlords screwed the land for all it was worth.

When the Stuarts regained the throne and attempted to catholicise Britain land was returned to catholic landlords, but life for the peasants hardly changed at all. When James II was finally defeated and deposed at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 the protestant ascendancy was confirmed and led to vicious repression of catholics. The Cromwellian Settlement was re-asserted, peasants worked for absentee landlords' resident middle-men in return for what amounted to a small potato patch with which to feed themselves. The rest they produced went to the middle-men as rent and to the Church of Ireland as tithes. If the peasants were able to produce more for themselves the amount they had to hand over increased to account for it. In this they were really serfs, when tillage was less profitable than grazing they were thrown off the land as less labour was needed. Peasants fought back through secret societies which carried out guerrilla actions upon middle-men, the Church of Ireland, state officials and stores. Only extensive and ruthless violence kept the land in the landlords' possession.

### Ulster Custom

The exception to this was in Ulster where the non-conformist protestant peasants had succeeded in their struggles to get tenants rights including fixed rents and security of tenure. Unlike in the South, higher productivity was in the interest of both peasant and landlord, and the development of capital there was much more tenable. Hence the development of Ulster as the centre of trade and production. "Ulster Custom", as it became known, led to economic development in the North that was impossible in the South for many years to come.

In 1779 the Irish parliament, made up of protestant landlords, was able to get the British government to drop discriminatory trading measures against Ireland under the threat of revolt and an all out fight for independence. Four years later they were granted home rule within the framework of the British Empire. "Grattans Parliament" was made up of protestant landlords and some of the industrial and merchant ruling class that was rising around Belfast. Feeling hard done by the power of the landlords, the members of this new class founded the "Society of United Irishmen" under the leadership of Wolfe-Tone with the aim of establishing an independent Ireland with joint catholic and protestant rulers. To counter this the British rulers helped set up the "Orange Society" which would fight for the protestant ascendancy and loyalty to the British state.



When the United Irishmen's revolt of 1798 failed, the British government were able to use it as a reason for reinstating direct rule and the Act of Union of 1801 dissolved Grattan's Parliament. As a result the economy of Ulster and particularly Belfast flourished as it became essentially part of that of Britain.

Peasant unrest continued. The Napoleonic wars and hence Britain's need for Irish corn due to the European blockade reduced numbers of evictions. Although the war ended in 1812, the 1815 corn laws maintained landlords' interest in growing corn and gave peasants a certain security of tenure. Against this background the small but growing catholic ruling class were able to divert much peasant unrest from land reform to so-called catholic emancipation. This meant fighting for the right of rich catholics to get political posts. After this was granted in 1829, the repeal of the Act of Union became the aim. In the 1830s peasant struggles succeeded in their fight against paying tithes to the Church of Ireland and in 1838 a Tithe Commutation Act was passed. As a result peasants were marginally better off, but not for long.

### The Famine

Between 1841 and 1880 the population of Ireland fell from eight to four million. There were three reasons for this: The failure of successive potato crops, the peasants subsistence food; The repeal of the corn laws made grazing more profitable so mass evictions ensued; The passing of the Irish Poor Law Relief Act of 1847 meant that starving peasants had to give up their land holdings before being granted aid. By 1851 a million had simply starved to death, whilst a further million had been forced to emigrate. Although it was in the interests of the British capitalists to make Ulster Custom widespread, landlord opposition was too great and the trend towards grazing and evictions accounted for the further depopulation.

It was during this period that mass tenants movements formed organising openly alongside the secret societies. These fought a prolonged land war against the English landlords. In 1869 the Church of Ireland was disestablished. At this time the Irish Republican Brotherhood, the Fenians, were acting and carrying out military actions against Britain at home and abroad. In 1881, in order to head off the IRB's call for national independence, tenant rights were finally granted to all Irish peasants.

During the 1870s the Home Rule League was formed, at first led by Isaac Butt, a protestant landlord, and from 1877 by Charles Parnell who also took over the Land League. The movement was based firmly on the interests of the southern ruling class which could not develop further without carrying out protectionist measures against British trade. They had great support amongst catholic peasants as the movement had developed from the emancipation movement. The Belfast capitalists could not afford this to happen as they needed the markets provided by the British Empire.

### Playing the Orange Card

In order to get mass resistance to home rule in the north, Ulster capitalists "played the orange card". This involved taking over the leadership of the Orange Order and using it to stir up traditional fear and prejudice amongst the protestants against the catholics. Slogans such as "Home Rule is Rome Rule" and "Remember 1690" were successful in provoking violent attacks on catholics and stopping the re-election of a Liberal government. The catholics reacted to these British sanctioned attacks by retreating into nationalism, and emphasis upon their Gaelic past. However, after the Liberals failed to pass the Home Rule Bills of 1886 and 1892 mass support began to flag. The upshot was that the nationalist movement passed into the hands of intellectuals such as Arthur Griffith who founded Sinn Fein, a nationalist organisation with few socialistic principles seeking state capitalist, protectionist Ireland.

The general election of 1910 left the Irish nationalisation



The general election of 1910 left the Irish nationalists with the balance of power. In return for their support for a Liberal government Gladstone offered them home rule. A bill was passed in 1912 and after much prevarication by the Lords would have become law in 1914 were it not for the outbreak of war. The Ulster capitalists prepared their opposition to this, set up a provisional government and organised its own army the Ulster Volunteer force. This though was not just in response to the threat of home rule, for there was also the threat of united working class action against them.

### Workers Unite

James Larkin formed the National Union of Dock Labourers in Belfast in 1907. Irish militants could not organise with British workers as the TUC and Labour Party were uninterested in the interests of Irish workers. Irish workers did not want organisations on the British model (divisive and excluding unskilled workers), but sought unified action of the whole working class. Larkin's union went on to launch a major strike against the Shipping Federation (the international shipowners association), and catholic and protestant workers united in paralysing the docks. The Irish Transport and General Workers Union was founded in 1909 and was pledged to the abolition of wage labour. It spread throughout Ireland under the leadership of James Connolly and in 1913 launched a six month strike against the Dublin Sweaters (sweatshop owners) during which the Irish Citizen Army was formed, a workers' militia that fought the employers' police who were tracking down the militants. Although these strikes did not win the working class of Ireland as a whole were learning to organise and unite against the bosses as a whole.

In setting up the Ulster Unionist Council as a provisional government along with the UVF, the Ulster bosses managed to play the Orange Card again and divide the working class, North and South. The militancy of workers was once again channelled into nationalism. Catholic republicanism was on the rise, and one time revolutionary Connolly now saw himself as part of the catholic nationalist tradition and became a member of the IRB and the Irish National Volunteers set up in response to the UVF.

### Bloody Easter

The outbreak of WWI caused a split in the nationalist movement. The great majority ~~XXXXXX~~ followed the pro-war nationalist members of parliament. Those who didn't, including Connolly, retained the name Irish National Volunteers and took up a defeatist position. It was these that the IRB planned to mobilise for the Easter Rising of 1916. Bloody Easter was a farce, internal rivalries prevented many Volunteers getting their marching orders, there was little public support and when Dublin castle was stormed and the constitution of independent Ireland declared most Dubliners had no idea what was going on. The rising was easily and ruthlessly crushed and its leaders executed. After the rising the Volunteers became known as the Sinn Fein Volunteers and later as the Irish Republican Army.

Sinn Fein won the most constituencies in the British general election of 1918 and in January 1919 declared themselves the rightful government of all Ireland under the constitution declared during the 1916 rising. The British decided to crush this desert and bloody war ensued between the IRA and the British Army and the infamous 'Black and Tans'. It was during this period that some of the most radical strikes in the history of the Irish working class occurred, ~~the~~ workers' councils were formed, not just in Cork, but in Co. Clare and Leitrim too. These were smashed by the combined actions of the employers and the IRA. In Belfast the January and February general strike of 1919 was defeated and although it had involved combined action by protestants and catholics the war in the south was used by the bosses to launch a "Holy War" against the catholics, a pogrom which drove many catholics from Ulster and from their jobs.

In December 1921 a truce was called in the anglo-irish war while peace negotiations began. The British government offered home rule for the 26 counties nominally subject to the crown with the freedom to introduce protectionist measures. Ulster, minus Donegal, Monaghan and Cavan would get home rule under the Stormont.



Sinn Fein and the IRA accepted this apart from a minority headed by De Valera who saw it as a betrayal of the Republican cause. The new Free State attempted to smash this opposition as what remained of the IRA having split from Sinn Fein turned their weapons upon ~~the~~ it. By 1923 the civil war had killed more than the war with Britain had and the Free Staters showed themselves capable of greater atrocities than even the dreaded Black and Tans. In 1923 what remained of the IRA stopped fighting the Free State openly, but continued to exist as an underground organisation directing their attention to the North.

The treatyite wing of Sinn Fein renamed itself Cumann na nGael, and De Valera took the old name for his party. At the end of 1925 the IRA split from Sinn Fein at least partially due to Sinn Fein's lack of success at the polls. In 1926 DeValera failed to get Sinn Fein to drop its abstentionist policy and left to form Fianna Fail (soldiers of fortune). In 1932 Fianna Fail won the Irish general election, their first act was to delete the oath of allegiance from the constitution and in 1935 an act of citizenship was passed that Britain refused to recognise, hence Irish citizens are still franchised to vote in British elections. When De Valera rewrote the constitution and refused to pay Britain annuities dating from the 1881 land reform the British government put an economic stranglehold on the free state until De Valera "settled the debt" with a lump sum payment of £10 million in 1938 and in return British armed forces were removed from Ireland.

As Germany had its brownshirts and Italy its blackshirts, the blueshirts arose in Ireland during the 1930s and it was from these that Fine Gael emerged, formed between the National Guard and Cumann na nGae~~n~~hael. This gained its support through communist scare-mongering and catholicism. Although Fianna Fail had to institute some welfare measures to offset the worst effects of the economic crisis, it also found itself accomodating the right. Acts by the IRA against industrial targets led to its being proscribed as an organisation and many of its members were rounded up.

Back in Ulster 1925 legislature was enacted to provide for segregated schools for catholics and protestants setting the seal on the sectarian statelet. ( It should be stated that although not provided by law, most schools in the south were divided according to religion too). The economic crisis hit Ulster hard and between 1929 and 1930 numbers in work halved. The fight against the effects of the crisis did at times link the two communities. For instance, in the strikes and riots against cuts in outdoor relief rates. In a rail strike protestant trade unionists allied with the IRA to be condemned by catholic priests and protestant leaders alike.

In response to actions such as these sectarian fears were whipped up: 1931 saw sectarian riots as did 1934 and in July 1935 attacks on catholics on a scale not seen since the pogrom of 1922. Once again violent sectarianism took the place of attacks on capital itself. The general election of 1938 was held against the background of intense poverty, over 10,000 unemployed and a chronic housing shortage. Naturally the unionists' election campaign ignored this, the main issue being the imminent sell-out in the British government negotiating with DE Valera.

In 1939 the IRA launched a bombing campaign on mainland Britain which was only really of nuisance value. Five people were killed in a premature explosion in Coventry whilst many more were injured. A wave of anti-irish hysteria followed, this justified two executions, and over 70 long prison sentences being meted out.

#### World War II

When the second world war began De Valera announced Ireland's neutrality in the conflict. Not that this was a principled stand, but he had no choice as Ireland was just not equipped to take part in a war. Churchill responded by severing all links with the Free State and came close to invading as he believed this neutrality could only play into the hands of the axis and that Ireland's ports were essential to the British war effort. Even so this 'neutrality' allowed allied aircraft to violate Free-State airspace, allowed allied pilots shot down to cross the border into Ulster when German pilots were interned, allowed tens of thousands of British evacuees shelter, provided



vital weather information to the allied airforces etc. etc.

The war provided the capitalists of the North with a boom period in aircraft arms, ship, clothing and machine production. However, the Luftwaffe pestered the poorly defended cities of Ulster leaving over 100,000 homeless. The only consolation being that most people had jobs.

After the war Ireland's capitalists found themselves fairly well off and by 1949 their foreign holdings amounted to about £400 million. At the same time foreign capital was investing in most of the free state's native industries. In 1948, shaken by a number of financial scandals, Fianna Fail lost office to an inter-party alliance including Fine Gael and Labour headed by J A Costello a former fascist sympathiser. Although the program of the inter-party government was little different to that of Fianna Fail the left republicans reacted against it quite quickly, the Communist Party of Ireland reformed as the Irish Workers League while Sinn Fein and the IRA reunited.

The inter-party government was successful at first, and ~~XXXX~~ it was able to streamline the welfare state quite considerably and its intervention and investment in the economy worked fairly well. However, it met with considerable opposition from the church in getting a mother and child care scheme through and had to drop it. This was because the church saw it as an attack on the parents' right and duty to provide for their offspring and saw help and advice about and during pregnancy as something to do with birth control. The doctors aligned behind the church as they felt the scheme would threaten their income. When Fianna Fail got back into power they were able to get a more conservative policy through but still not without considerable opposition.

#### Declaration of the Republic

In April 1949 the inter-party government declared the 26 counties a republic and the British government responded by declaring that only by a majority vote in the 6 counties would Northern Ireland cease to be a part of the United Kingdom. Ireland had ceased to be seen as part of the commonwealth. In September, despite the severance of links with Britain, when London devalued the pound Ireland followed suit in order to maintain the financial link. Ireland was plunged into a balance of payments crisis, had to recall some £30 million worth of its foreign holdings and for the first time the ~~ma~~ majority of Ireland's assets were within its borders. On top of this the 1950 crop failure and a fuel shortage led to bread rationing and price fixing. The inter-party government began to split and the 1951 election put Fianna Fail back in power with the help of some of the dissenters and the catholic church still opposing Costello's "unholy" health plans.

Post-war Northern Ireland was becoming more and more reactionary. Unionists opposed being forced to implement "socialist measures", the welfare state, as was being done by the Labour government in Britain, many calling for Ulster to be given dominion status. In the meantime their gerrymandering of elections was impressive in its sheer blatancy and success. In 1954 they banned the tricolour and this amongst other provocative acts put the IRA back on the offensive. Raids were carried out for arms over the next two years. In November 1956 Fianna Uladh (soldiers of Ulster) a group formed after a split in the IRA, declared war on the NI state. The IRA followed suit a month later, it could hardly do otherwise.

Back in Dublin it was not long before Costello was back in the chair and Fianna Fail ousted. The 1952 budget failed to halt the deepening crisis in Ireland's economy and the government lost a lot of support in the ruling class who sought cuts in direct taxes and state expenditure. This when Britain was in boom. In 1954, therefore the inter-party government was in power again, but after getting Ireland into the United Nations, reintroducing the Offences Against the State Act and rounding up suspected members of the IRA they were once more put out of office. Fianna Fail took over in 1957 facing over 70,000 unemployed and an emigration rate the highest since 1922.

During the sixties the trade union movement was expanding along with a growth in the metropolitan areas as agriculture slumped, high inflation and a major housing crisis. To deal with the latter a large squatters movement formed along with militant housing groups. Extensive emigration continued and this



was probably the major factor in the small fall in unemployment to 59,000 in 1970.

When Britain and Ireland entered the EEC in 1973 many Irish farmers became millionaires overnight through the common agricultural policy and a guaranteed market for their produce. They were instrumental in the economic revival Ireland enjoyed during the seventies, however this could not last. The eighties have seen a return to slump, Fine Gael, the ruling party, desperately seeking as close ties as possible with Britain. This has involved them bending over backwards to carry out its wishes with regard to the suppression of the IRA and the signing away of the Irish constitution in the hope that Britain will somehow pull Ireland from the abyss. But with the vast majority of the countries economy in foreign hands and the world recession deepening, the future is particularly bleak for the Irish ruling class.

#### The Troubles of the North

The IRA's border war lasted from 1956 to 1962 and was curtailed due to falling support amongst the catholic population. They therefore turned from the gun and bomb to the ballot box. This however did little to dissuade protest and fear and hatred of catholics, if anything sectarian violence were increasing and institutionalised oppression continued. In response in 1967 a campaign for social justice was formed and successfully gathered members on a non-sectarian basis. This led to the formation of the Civil Rights Association which succeeded in linking catholic and protestant and in gaining a number of reforms in the election system and housing allocation. This was the forerunner of People's Democracy. Success was short lived as more and more of their demonstrations came under increasing violence from the RUC and loyalists. In July 1968 the Derry Apprentice Boys held their annual loyalist march. Some catholic youths began to brick the parade and were leapt upon by riot police. Catholics rushed to their defense, the police forcing them back into the Bogside, barricades went up and petrol bombs and flagstones met the RUC. The Wilson government could not let the Bogside get butchered by the RUC and loyalist hords so the army was sent in to restore peace. They surrounded the Bogside, inside the barricades a citizens defense committee had formed and Free Derry proclaimed.

In October 'radical' reforms were announced, the RUC would cease to carry firearms and the B Specials would be disbanded and replaced by the Ulster Defence Regiment in which catholics would be welcomed. The RUC is still armed and the UDR turned out to be simply a better armed and trained version of the B Specials. The British Army engaged in its first big gun battle of the troubles. Three died and sixty ~~xxx~~ six were wounded, but this was not a battle with republicans but against loyalists.

The IRA split in 1969 a quarter leaving to form the provisionals. Their reasons were that the IRA had failed to react in the lead up to Free Derry and that the organisation was too extreme in its socialist politics. They became active during 1970.

The British Army's role began to change, no longer were they defending the catholics, but oppressing them and the loyalists were virtually ignored. In Belfast intelligence officers were posted to find ways of stirring up sectarian troubles as had been done in Aden before. Bloody Sunday, January 31st 1972 when paratroops murdered 13 unarmed civil rights demonstrators in cold blood has been seen as just one of their tactics.

In 1972 a number of UDA members were involved in negotiations with the IRA. Supposedly their aim was to unite the two organisations on the basis of their concern for the working class. These UDA men were either shot or forced to flee the country by the UDA, you don't talk socialism in the UDA and get away with it.

1974 saw the Ulster Workers Council strike against British negotiations with 'Eire' and the formation of the Northern Ireland Executive. In November the Birmingham pub bombings killed 19 people, both provisionals and officials denied any responsibility, but the Prevention of Terrorism Act was rushed through parliament on a wave of anti-irish hysteria.



In 1975 the Officials split and the Irish National Liberation Army and its political wing the Irish Republican Socialist Party was formed. The political basis of this was a form of trotskyist connollyite socialism. The officials were more or less stalinist and were soon to become the Workers' Party and almost dropped out of military activity altogether. The provisionals meanwhile were becoming a force in the community, if anyone in catholic areas gets any problem with housing or benefits they will almost certainly turn to the local Sinn Fein office to help them pursue their claim or whatever. However, the IRA still maintains conservative catholic attitude towards birth control abortion, etc. The INLA however has taken up a progressive attitude to these issues.

The most significant development of the past few years has been the Anglo-Irish Deal. This has provoked similar reactions to the Sunningdale agreement of 1974. Although on first sight this looked like some attempt to unite Ireland in that it proposed some consultation with Dublin in running Northern Ireland, it is nothing of the sort. Fitzgerald signed away the Irish constitution in accepting British sovereignty over Ulster and agreed to take a more offensive role in stopping the IRA. The British government successfully got a deal through that would stir up both republican and unionist alike, put the seal on British occupation of the North and still appear to be trying to solve the problems of that troubled statelet. An exceptional coup and one that could only increase the oppression of catholics in Ulster as well as dividing them even more as the middle class SDLP would support the agreement.