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The Rise and Fall of 'New Ulster': Northern Irish Politics in Flux, 1963-1969

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The Rise and Fall of “New Ulster”: Northern Irish Politics in Flux, 1963-1969

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Senior Honors Thesis

College of William & Mary Lyon G. Tyler Department of History

Defended 21 April 2020

The Rise and Fall of “New Ulster”: Northern Irish Politics in Flux, 1963-1969

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts in History from
The College of William and Mary

by

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Accepted for **High Honors**

(Honors, High Honors, Highest Honors)

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When I first began planning this project some eighteen months ago, I had two broad goals in mind: to write a historical narrative that did justice to its subject matter, and to eschew the condescending airs typical of much Irish History. By justice, I mean illustrating these human lives as fairly as my historical narrative's framework would allow. And, by avoiding condescension, I reference the disappointingly common viewpoint which holds that the Northern Irish have been in thrall to timeworn hatreds. Now that my work is finished, I think I have achieved both these ambitions as best I could.

The pursuit of truth is a burden that rests, to borrow from Joyce, "upon all the living and the dead." If our contemporaries will not judge us for whether we follow that bold and righteous path, then History shall.

Introduction: A Time of Hope and Disarray

No longer may any Protestant wonder where his loyalties lie. They lie on the side of law and order and public decency. They can have nothing to do with those who have been sowing dragon's teeth, and can now see how terrible the harvest can be. Ulster is in danger of being thrown back into a dark past by sectarian forces which have too long been winked at by many who should know better.¹

An Ideology Obscured

Much has been said regarding the final, dramatic years of Northern Ireland's 1960s. At the time, the region was ingrained in ongoing global trends: consumer anxiety, post-colonial revolt, crises of national identity, and broad political upheaval all visited the province as much as any other Western European country during this period. However, the ethnoreligious conflict unique to Northern Ireland between the 1960s and 1990s has led many observers to judge the region dismissively. Still today one may hear the assumption that it is a land lost within the haze of fraternal bloodshed, trapped by the memory of preceding decades and centuries. Throughout English-language historiography, Northern Ireland remains a haunted region, asphyxiated by the burden of a terrible and divided past that encroaches upon the present. This treatment ignores the reality of modern Northern Irish History. While the outbreak of sectarian violence in the late 1960s may in hindsight seem inevitable, it was far from such. The Troubles were the outcome of political and social processes in the 1960s, with Northern Ireland's political leadership central to these developments.

Between 1963 and 1969, Terence O'Neill, the fourth Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, oversaw his province's unexpected descent into turmoil. Even so, O'Neill's actions as Premier

¹ *Belfast Telegraph* editorial on the murder of Matilda Gould, 27 June 1966, in Feeny et al., *Lost Lives: The Stories of the Men, Women and Children who Died as a Result of the Northern Ireland Troubles* (London: Mainstream Publishing, 2001), 29.

continue to be obscured through scholarly oversimplification. Studies that treat O'Neill's time in office with any depth remain hard to come by, and profound examinations of his policies remain all but nonexistent. However, under the broad political ideals of "O'Neillism," the Northern Irish Prime Minister disseminated novel political traditions throughout his country. His ideological foundations challenged longstanding customs in Northern Ireland. As conservative cultural movements awoke in response to his policies, O'Neill inspired his contemporaries to aspire towards forward-looking change. These clashing sentiments spiraled the province into disorder. To reveal his significance in modern Northern Irish History is to unlock the harrowingly preventable nature of the Troubles.

Because scholarship trends towards pithy or shallow analyses of the O'Neill Ministry, historical writing usually overlooks how unique this time was in Northern Ireland, for O'Neill reshaped the horizons of Northern Irish society. Some critical literature rightly positions Terence O'Neill as a key player amidst the origin of the Troubles, yet even this body of historiography fails to display the Premier's distinct contributions to provincial life. O'Neill galvanized the province from its unimaginative political status quo following a decades-long and stifling adherence to conservative political culture in Northern Irish high politics. His independent, ambitious, and assertive leadership offered certainty and stability in an uncertain and agitated time. The tenets of O'Neillism held that Northern Ireland was both a full member of the international community and a partner of Great Britain. Through the industrious and conscientious laboring of the Northern Irish population, O'Neill argued, the province could demonstrate its merit to the entire world. Diplomatically, economically, and ideologically, Terence O'Neill integrated his province into post-war Western political culture. Though a stalwart adherent of the Union between Great Britain and Northern Ireland, he affirmed the

province's right to shape its own destiny, guiding his citizenry to the fore of ongoing global conversations surrounding "modernity," and what "progress" meant in the modern world.

The State of O'Neillism Studies

Although many scholars contend that the Troubles began at a specific historical moment, this analytical framework muddies our comprehensive understanding of modern Northern Irish society, for it induces perilous assumptions about who held the most power before conflict erupted. Viewing the origin of the Troubles as a moment, rather than a process, leads writers to blame specific social groups for fomenting violence. One vein of analysis argues that the Troubles began with the emergence of an organized Catholic Civil Rights movement in late 1968. Scholars such as Barry White and Caroline Kennedy-Pipe link this development with exploding levels of violence in the province, insinuating that Civil Rights marchers provoked both Protestant militias and the Northern Irish security forces.² Other writers, by contrast, cast more blame upon the unionist community. Many of those who date the origin of the Troubles to 1969—particularly the summer of 1969—depict swaths of the Protestant population as violent harbingers of chaos who, in their anti-Catholic aggression, forced London to station troops across the province.³ This line of thought, as before, is only part of the real story. We must shift our analysis of Northern Irish History from the political grassroots on its own to interactions between Stormont and the wider public. The slow process of social breakdown that visited Northern Ireland by 1969 had its distant roots in the early modern era, but its immediate causes

² Barry White, "From Conflict to Violence," in John Darby et al., *Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1983), 181. Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, *The Origins of the Present Troubles in Northern Ireland* (New York: Addison Wesley Longman, 1997), 31.

³ Eric Kaufmann and Henry Patterson, *Unionism and Orangeism in Northern Ireland since 1945: The Decline of the Loyal Family* (New York: Manchester University Press, 2007), 91. Ian McAllister, "Political Parties: Traditional and Modern," in *Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict*, 63. Paddy Hillyard, "Law and Order," in *Northern Ireland: The Background to the Conflict*, 35.

were in the political events of the 1960s. Grassroots movements and the Northern Irish political establishment both contributed to the Troubles. Only by analyzing the interaction of these forces may we begin to understand the direct origins of the Troubles.

The preceding historiographical arguments I have illustrated all bear the implicit assumption that, at some point, the Troubles were fated—being the unstoppable product of pent-up angst and frustration throughout “low” politics; however, we must recognize the conflict for what it was: the gradual result of preventable human error. The former position inhibits us from studying the complex nature of Northern Ireland’s descent into political instability. Worst of all, it takes blame away from Unionist Party leaders, those who bore the most peace-keeping responsibility during the 1960s. Marc Mulholland has criticized an “insecure” and “suspicious” Protestant voting bloc for stonewalling Terence O’Neill’s proposed community relations scheme.⁴ Even more brazenly, J. Bowyer Bell has seen flashpoints of sectarian violence in 1966 as “very possibly a prologue to the gun,” while Feargal Cochrane has contended that the corruption of the Northern Irish political system made the violence of the late 1960s “entirely predictable.”⁵ Even this last criticism takes away responsibility from the political elite of the time, and transfers it to the extant political culture at large. As late as 1965, Terence O’Neill himself publicly insisted that communal relations between Protestant and Catholics would stabilize in subsequent years.⁶ No one saw the Troubles coming. The reason for this fact was that Unionist leaders, including Terence O’Neill, failed to comprehend their own ignorance of

⁴ Marc Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads: Ulster Unionism in the O’Neill Years, 1960-9* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2000), 196.

⁵ J. Bowyer Bell, *The Irish Troubles: A Generation of Violence, 1967-1992* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1993), 31. Feargal Cochrane, “Why Politics Failed and Violence Began, 1921-1972,” in *Northern Ireland, the Reluctant Peace* (New Haven, CT: Yale UP, 2013), 74.

⁶ John O’Donoghue and Terrence O’Neill, “Transcript of Interview with Prime Minister of Northern Ireland on Telefís Éireann,” 18 February 1965, 13, *CAIN*, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/bibdb/cainbib.htm>.

the lived conditions that Catholic and Protestant citizens suffered. The gap between Unionist politicians' ambitions, and the desires of private citizens, most readily explains why politics stagnated during the 1960s. Expanding our understanding of the Troubles from just an ethnic conflict—as Mulholland has suggested—into a debate over political ideology, as well, illuminates why the values of the O'Neill Ministry failed to deter grassroots political upheaval by the late 1960s.⁷ Until now, the intricacies of these values have remained sorely underexamined.

Much academic literature continues to misunderstand Terence O'Neill's political agenda, for by overlooking the impact his beliefs had on contemporary Northern Irish politics, studies paint him as an ineffectual, even irrelevant, leader. This practice undermines O'Neill's historical significance as an agent of political change in early post-war Northern Ireland. All too often, scholars debate the Premier's intent, and in doing so they lose sight of his real social impact. Many such intent-focused pieces place the onus of sectarian violence in the late 1960s on O'Neill, arguing that he had little to no interest in ending anti-Catholic apartheid policies. Bob Purdie has written extensively on O'Neill's alleged "liberal façade," and his supposed active disinterest in treating Catholic citizens' grievances with genuine care.⁸ Similarly, Henry Patterson, David Gordon, Feargal Cochrane, and Maurice Fitzpatrick have each depicted O'Neill as a traditional unionist and "reactionary" within regional politics, who did little to advance sociopolitical change, and even sustained ongoing political stagnation.⁹ While my study by no means defends O'Neill's community relations shortcomings, I argue that these characterizations

⁷ Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*, ix.

⁸ Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Streets: The Origins of the Civil Rights Movement in Northern Ireland* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1990), 14, 34-35 (quote).

⁹ Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939* (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), 192-4. David Gordon, *The O'Neill Years: Unionist Politics, 1963-1969* (Belfast: Athol Books, 1989), 9 (quote), 157, 160-1. Feargal Cochrane, "Meddling at the Crossroads: The Decline and Fall of Terence O'Neill within the Unionist Community," in *Unionism in Modern Ireland: New Perspectives on Politics and Culture*, ed. Richard English and Graham Walker (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 7.

mistake the Premier's inability to heal fracturing community relations for genuine disinterest in the same. However, just because O'Neill did not singlehandedly forge a modern, tolerant society does not mean that he maintained the political status quo. His political policies brought significant, if at times slow, changes to Northern Ireland's political culture. By centering O'Neill in our study of Northern Ireland before the Troubles, we can reveal how profound those changes were.

At the same time, though, other scholars have viewed Terence O'Neill through an apologetic lens, casting him as the victim of unstoppable irrational forces, and absolving his ideas and actions from having influenced Ulster society during the 1960s. Studies of this vein present O'Neill as a modernizing leader burdened with a retrograde and intransigent constituency. Scholars who follow the given sentiment position O'Neill as "trapped" by an intolerant society, his calls for unity supposedly falling on the deaf ears of both reactionary Protestant loyalists and revolutionary Civil Rights marchers.¹⁰ In this sense, the Premier becomes a fallen hero, unable to translate his sweeping political ambitions into reality. This point of view not only dismisses Terence O'Neill's effect upon contemporary political life. Far worse, it condescends against the agency and lived experiences of the Northern Irish population. Such studies portray the large body of politically conscious Northern Irish people as a monolithic group. The specter of ethnoreligious tribalism, and the insinuation that the Northern Irish form a backwards, factionalist-inclined nation, festers throughout historical scholarship. At its worst,

¹⁰ James Loughlin, *The Ulster Question since 1945* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004), 35. Jonathan Tonge, *Northern Ireland: Conflict and Change. 2nd edition* (Pearson Education Harlow, Essex: 2002), 40. Martin Orr, "The National Question and the Struggle against British Imperialism in Northern Ireland," in *The National Question: Nationalism, Ethnic Conflict, and Self-Determination in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Berberoglu Berch (Philadelphia: Temple UP, 1995), 170, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt14bstd1.11>. Peter Rose, *How the Troubles Came to Northern Ireland* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 141-4, 168, 176, 178-9. Sabine Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945* (New York: Longman, 1999), 113.

this fixation with “[a]ncient hatreds” and “tribal” personalities deflects our understanding of how O’Neill influenced grassroots political identities.¹¹ We cannot discuss Terence O’Neill’s hand in creating an industrial-consumer society and a more progressive political system without also engaging with his shortcomings, and his culpability in the chaos that began by summer 1969. He is as much guilty for ending the stability of the age as he is responsible for integrating the province into modern geopolitics. O’Neill’s liberalism was complex. To give it a simplistic overview is a disservice to the citizens who lived under his government, as much as it is to the Premier’s legacy.

Even when scholars have attempted to dissect O’Neill’s policies, though, many have limited themselves to discussing the Premier’s civil rights platform. Isolating the story of the O’Neill Ministry to this single issue means that we lose sight of the various ways in which the Prime Minister altered regional political culture. The Civil Rights movement itself was one of the most significant forces in Northern Ireland before the Troubles began. O’Neill’s relationship with the movement deserves study to create a fuller picture of society undergoing collapse. Very few scholars have attempted to explain how the Premier’s economic and social philosophy informed his Civil Rights platform. Seemingly any scholarly analysis that writes of Civil Rights issues as if they dominated O’Neill’s time in office produces broad, detracting evaluations of his government as a “failure of reform.”¹² But “O’Neillism”—the overarching political tenets that Terence O’Neill professed—encompassed far more issues than community relations. His beliefs on this as well as many other major social issues were not, as Feargal Cochrane has described

¹¹ Johnathan Bardon, *A History of Ulster* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1993), 623 (first quote). Cochrane, “Meddling at the Crossroads,” 161. Graham Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party: Protest, Pragmatism, and Pessimism* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 285. Bell, *The Irish Troubles*, 86.

¹² Orr, “The National Question and the Struggle against British Imperialism in Northern Ireland,” 170 (quote). Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945*, 84. Cochrane, “Meddling at the Crossroads,” 148-50. Cochrane, “Why Politics Failed and Violence Began,” 37-9.

them, “incoherent.”¹³ Addressing Civil Rights came late in O’Neill’s government. This subject was but a fragment of his grand vision to make Northern Ireland a modern and industrialized liberal-democratic consumer society, which borrowed from both Western Cold War era political traditions in general, and post-war, one-nation British Toryism in particular.

Even though scholarship in the 1990s and 2000s has been more inclined to examine O’Neill’s ideological influence upon Ulster unionism, very few scholars have comprehended his dynamic ambition to transform Northern Irish society. Only Marc Mulholland has begun to examine O’Neill’s political agenda for all its reach and scale. The Premier was, Mulholland explains, “extraordinarily ambitious,” his thoughts often lingering on Northern Ireland’s potential to advance towards modernity.¹⁴ Evidently no scholars, by contrast, have attempted to explicate O’Neill’s understanding of modernity, or how his modernizing vision altered contemporary political discourse surrounding industrialization and consumer society. As O’Neill saw it, modernization—or the process of making Northern Ireland a modern state—meant economic and political innovation. The province could become modern if it made constant investments in its own material development. Scholarship broadly seems to assume that O’Neill did not leave a significant imprint on Unionist politics, beyond splintering his own party. The multiple “political meanings” of the Premier’s value system remain lost throughout most modern Northern Irish historiography.¹⁵ Studies tend to emphasize how the O’Neill Ministry divided Unionist Party members, supposedly by pushing too hard for sociopolitical change. Beyond touching on O’Neill’s community relations policies, however, these studies rarely

¹³ Cochrane, “Meddling at the Crossroads,” 165.

¹⁴ Marc Mulholland, *Terence O’Neill* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2013), viii, 17.

¹⁵ J. D. Cash, “Taking Ideology Seriously: The Case of Northern Ireland” (PhD dissertation, Yale University, 1993), 188, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/304077392?pq-origsite=primo>.

explain in detail how the unionist community received O'Neill's overarching political agenda.¹⁶ My study will show that this reaction was layered and in constant flux. Modernity intrigued many elements of early post-war Northern Irish society, even though the definition of and extent to which modernization was welcome differed across the province. As a result, Terence O'Neill's political values were influential and controversial to varying degrees. Striving to give Northern Ireland a greater place in the world, he widened the horizons of regional politics while simultaneously inviting greater inward division.

O'Neill and Unionist Modernization

To comprehend Terence O'Neill's modernization scheme, we must put his ideas into conversation with the modernization vogue that penetrated American and Western European society by the early 1960s, as this broad ideal informed his fixation with economic and material modernization. The early post-war era popularized the notion that, for a democratic state to be modern, it should harness its physical and human resources in order to advance economic growth. Growth as a benefit to public welfare thus became the golden standard of Western democratic statecraft into the 1950s and beyond. This standard unified state planning and investment with capitalist economics to create a liberal system that strove for big tent appeal.¹⁷ A general goal for many Cold War democracies emerged: to accrue a stable welfare state which cooperated with private sector forces in order to promote growth. This idea translated into how states served their citizenry. From a focus on industrial-economic productivity came the

¹⁶ Bell, *The Irish Troubles*, 53-55, 67. Cochrane, "Meddling at the Crossroads," 148, 161, 166. Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party*, 172, 180, 183. Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*, 11, 198.

¹⁷ Terrance G. Carroll, "Secularization and States of Modernity," *World Politics* 36, no. 3 (1984): 364, 366-7, 369-71, doi:10.2307/2010379. Ellen Meiksins Wood, "Modernity, Postmodernity or Capitalism?," *Review of International Political Economy* 4, no. 3 (1997): 541, 543, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/4177238>. Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 68-9.

corollary ideal of a consumer society, which consider the population's purchasing and distributing goods as a social boon, in addition to an economic positive. This concept of the "[m]ass consumerist society" achieved tremendous weight in post-war British politics, for as some commentators at the time argued, consumer society could stabilize the country by harmonizing class and cultural differences under the same shared consumer identity.¹⁸

Throughout the Western democratic world, more broadly, economic progress and social progress (now defined as consumer wellbeing) were intertwined—the former induced the latter. This unified ambition of improving the national economy and its consumer base created a model of transforming the nation on a cultural level as much as a physical one.

By advancing a state-led push for economic growth and the inclusion of more consumers in the national economy, early post-war modernization sought to achieve cultural unity by professing a universalizing national culture. To an extent, this practice might stem from the emergence of the nation-state ideal from the nineteenth century onwards. By mid-century, however, the conception of modernity that would influence Terence O'Neill did not prioritize ethnic uniformity, but social uniformity around a shared national consumer value system. This state model discouraged local identities and local cultures. The "ideal" citizen of the modern country shed their local interests and embraced secular symbols of identity that might appeal to their national cohort throughout the country.¹⁹ In Britain, arguably, the Crown served as such a symbol—a cultural icon of common fellowship under, and loyalty towards, the monarch. Conservative politicians deliberately constructed this symbol of the British nation. Although this

¹⁸ Stanley Rothman, "Modernity and Tradition in Britain," *Social Research* 28, no. 3 (1961): 318, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40969391>.

¹⁹ Nicos Mouzelis, "Modernity and the Secularization Debate," *Sociology* 46, no. 2 (2012): 207, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/43497252>. Carroll, "Secularization and States of Modernity," 362-3, 366. Rothman, "Modernity and Tradition in Britain," 316.

token did not convince all Britons, it still influenced many people—including O’Neill himself. Nevertheless, while early post-war political modernization failed to transform the whole body of Western countries, the relevant ambitions of a common civic identity and national identity, as opposed to local ones, caught wind among the Western democratic political elite. Chief among modernity’s political acolytes was Terence O’Neill. While much discourse on economic and political modernization raged throughout Great Britain, Northern Irish leaders proved as receptive to this debate as did politicians in England, Scotland, or Wales.

In concert with O’Neill’s rise to power, 1950s and 1960s Britain underwent a political mood shift that favored “modern” political culture, invoking industry and technological merit in order to improve government efficiency and social wellbeing. Across Western Europe, the 1960s saw sweeping reform movements that championed social and political progress.²⁰ A decade prior in the United Kingdom, though, the quest for forward-oriented politics had already begun to grip regional society, albeit with different ends. The British modernization vogue of the 1950s invited a technocratic and meritocratic bureaucracy, in the hopes that rational planning and industrial-consumer economic development would create a lasting standard of social wellness. Proponents of this vision from C. P. Snow to Harold Macmillan almost universally championed materialism. Access to material goods within the mixed economy became one of the chief measurements of the reigning government’s political success. Finding appeal among both Labour and Conservative ranks, this taste for material modernity swept across British political life.²¹ A frenzied race to promote greater consumption, full employment, and consumer

²⁰ Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe’s Twentieth Century* (New York: Vintage Books, 2000), 313.

²¹ Aaron Edwards, “The NILP in Retreat, 1969–72,” in *A History of the Northern Ireland Labour Party: Democratic Socialism and Sectarianism* (Manchester UP, 2009), 159, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jfvn.12>. Guy Ortolano, *The Two Cultures Controversy: Science, Literature and Cultural Politics in Postwar Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009), 10-11, 16-19. Mazower, *Dark Continent*, 313, 317. Peter Gurney, “The Battle of the Consumer in Post-war Britain,” *The Journal of Modern History* 77, no. 4 (2005): 957, doi:10.1086/499831.

happiness ensued. As Britain turned towards the 1960s, the limits of state power shifted in turn, taking all of the United Kingdom into a larger search for Cold War era political identity.

State expansion and state planning centered the modern British political culture, whose proponents expected government economic intervention to tend to the nascent consumer society. By the time O'Neill became Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, in 1963, the interventionist vogue was still relatively new in British politics. As recently as the mid-1950s, the British Conservative Party government had striven to lower taxation and spending, as well as deescalate state planning initiatives. Only by the tail-end of the decade did the Tory political establishment embrace tangible expansionist policies. Growth-based economic planning, government development councils, and even reshaped cabinet ministries which aimed to develop economic expansion all came into force during the late 1950s. The fear of socialism that asphyxiated the Third Churchill Ministry gradually faded.²² As Anthony Eden and particularly Harold Macmillan escalated government spending, the Conservative Party shifted its focus away from tempering an expanding welfare state, and it looked towards battling inflation—the byproduct of a growth-centric economic plan.²³ That Terence O'Neill introduced similar expansionist policies into Northern Irish politics as one-nation British Conservatives promoted them was no coincidence. O'Neill was crucial in transmitting this modernist vision of the state throughout his province. In Northern Ireland as in Great Britain, it was a novel concept concerning how the

²² James Cronin, *The Politics of State Expansion: War, State and Society in Twentieth-Century Britain* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 16-17, 201-3, 208, 209, 212, 215, 225-227. Brian Harrison, *Seeking a Role: The United Kingdom, 1951-1970* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2009), 302.

²³ Cronin, *The Politics of State Expansion*, 209, 212, 215, 225-7. Harrison, *Seeking a Role*, 304-5, 308. Konrad H. Jarausch, *Out of Ashes: A New History of Europe in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 2015), 301, 412-3, 564. Mark Pitchford, "Macmillan and Home: 'Pink Socialism' and 'True-Blue' Conservatism, 1957-64," in *The Conservative Party and the Extreme Right 1945-1975* (Manchester UP, 2011), 69, 95, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jbgg.8>. Mark Garnett and Kevin Hickson, "Harold Macmillan," in *Conservative Thinkers: The Key Contributors to the Political Thought of the Modern Conservative Party* (Manchester UP, 2009), 11, 17, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155j5r6.5>.

state should govern. However, the British vogue of modernity did not translate smoothly into the Northern Irish political context. As O'Neill drew from his English counterparts, conservative Ulster loyalists, grassroots Catholic activists, and moderate Unionist Party leaders adapted and co-opted modernity to meet their own end-goals. An ideological storm ensued that remolded the province throughout the 1960s.

Although O'Neill legitimized the pursuit of “modern” and “progressive” policies in establishment politics, he did not monopolize these terms, as different factions in Northern Irish society championed alternative understandings of modernization. The broad prospect of a Northern Ireland that marched in step with the modern world appealed to people across the province. From the working-classes to the political elite, economic expansion and “modernity,” in its most lucid sense, tantalized Northern Irish community leaders.²⁴ Of course, few agreed on the boundaries of modernity, as well as whether economic progress should herald social change, beyond the emergence of a consumer society. O'Neill hoped that rising consumerism might smooth over lingering ethnosectarian tensions across Northern Ireland and eliminate the importance of ethnocultural identity among his Unionist Party voting base and Civil Rights activists.²⁵ Granted, in O'Neill's vision, welcoming modernity did not mean that longstanding social differences would fade overnight.²⁶ The end-goal of social harmony that modernity—especially O'Neill's modernity—pursued seemed intangible without a consensus vision for

²⁴ Marc Mulholland, *Terence O'Neill*, ix. Jeremy Smith, ““Ever Reliable Friends’?: The Conservative Party and Ulster Unionism in the Twentieth Century,” *The English Historical Review* 121, no. 490 (2006): 81, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3806241>.

²⁵ Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*, 37-42. Sarah Campbell, “The Plough and the Tricolour: Gerry Fitt and the Evolution of Nationalist Politics in Northern Ireland, 1959–69,” in *Gerry Fitt and the SDLP: In a Minority of One* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 2015), 186, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1mf7077.7>.

²⁶ James G. Mac Laughlin and John A. Agnew, “Hegemony and the Regional Question: The Political Geography of Regional Industrial Policy in Northern Ireland, 1945-1972,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 76, no. 2 (1986): 247-8, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2562847>.

Northern Ireland. Where Great Britain's political establishment witnessed a broad political consensus favoring a new democratic consumer society, Northern Ireland was fractured.

Terence O'Neill failed to transform Northern Ireland into a perfectly harmonious consumer society largely because his agenda conflicted with older unionist political traditions. Unionist political culture preceding O'Neill approved of economic growth, but it championed social order and the defense of Protestant cultural sovereignty above all else. The Premier stood against the legacy of insular unionist politics, which ever feared perceived slights against the Protestant community. By proposing to transform Northern Ireland, O'Neill rekindled the anxious passions of the loyalist community. Much loyalist opposition to O'Neill's reforms stemmed from the assumption that a universalizing society which balanced British and Ulster identities meant either oppressing the Protestant population, elevating a seemingly "disloyal" Catholic community, or committing both acts at once.²⁷ Within the Ulster Protestant population, the legacy of the Irish revolutionary period and centuries of apartheid politics created immense distrust for Irish Catholics by the 1960s. Catholic people in Northern Ireland became little more than fifth columnists of an aggressor nation to the vocal elements of Northern Ireland's ardent loyalist population.²⁸ Terence O'Neill's occasional unwillingness to communicate directly with this vocal minority, particularly within the Protestant working-class, only aggravated their fears. Thus, what J. D. Cash has called the Prime Minister's "attempt to rework Unionism as an inclusivist ideology" remained egregiously misunderstood by some at the time.²⁹ Whether out of stubborn refusal to commune with Protestant loyalists, in addition to Roman Catholics, or out of sheer ignorance towards the loyalist philosophy's fears, O'Neill reaped his own doom. He

²⁷ Michael MacDonald, "Blurring the Difference: The Politics of Identity in Northern Ireland," *South African Sociological Review* 3, no. 1 (1990): 19, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44461166>.

²⁸ MacDonald, "Blurring the Difference," 22, 24.

²⁹ Cash, "Taking Ideology Seriously," 210.

refused to temper his bold and transformative rhetoric for the sake of public appearance, and his effort to nurture a new Northern Ireland suffered accordingly.

Despite this failure to shape loyalist sentiments, however, Terence O’Neill’s legacy remains one of daring political change, and his intent to recreate Northern Ireland ensured that old sectarian political norms would face steep resistance for decades to come. Throughout his time in office, O’Neill declared the coming of a “new Ulster.”³⁰ This phrase heralded many things. It represented his vision of economic growth and consumer organization, and the physical and cultural evolution of his province; the abolition of unflinching sectarian party politics, and the beginning of Northern Ireland’s full participation in the European community. Although O’Neill promised that government planning would change Northern Ireland throughout his Ministry, he also positioned the new Ulster as a movement to which all Northern Irish people were beholden. As he led the charge towards a clearer provincial modernity, his constituents would, he imagined, cooperate to build that harmonious consumer society themselves. He aspired to bring Northern Ireland into the fold of post-war Western politics as a nation-state worthy of recognition—one which could benefit the global industrial community through its economic and cultural feats of strength. This vision of a Northern Ireland transformed did not fulfill itself in the ways O’Neill may have imagined when he first succeeded to the Premiership. The Prime Minister’s works shook the province regardless. In great part due to his efforts, Northern Ireland would end the 1960s forever ingrained within the modern world.

³⁰ “The Prime Minister’s Message to the ‘Unionist,’” 26 November 1963, PM/5/31/36. O’Neill, speech to the Annual Dinner of the Cardiff and District Ulster Association, 13 March 1964, 2. UUC Yearbook, 21 March 1968, D1327/20/1/30, 11. Terence O’Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads* (London: Faber and Faber, 1969), 197.

A Legacy Hidden No More

Historical studies of the O'Neill Ministry remain a misunderstood subject, as many scholars contest the extent to which, and even whether, Terence O'Neill was a meaningful actor in pre-Troubles History. Such studies often lose sight of the impact that individual leaders wielded amid the tumultuous and localized processes that visited Northern Ireland on what would be the eve of political breakdown. O'Neill remains a consistent victim of this analytic outlook. By marking the Premier as destined to political failure, scholarship muddies the collective histories of Northern Irish people with fatalistic analysis. The reality is that O'Neill wielded tremendous power in his time. He at once held great responsibility for both the outbreak of violence in the late 1960s, and Northern Ireland's dramatic entry into the geopolitical discourse of the Cold War. He shattered the mold of contemporary Northern Irish politics. A thorough examination of how this change occurred reveals not only the rich ideological discourse that visited Northern Ireland before the Troubles. It also illuminates the fluid meaning of "modernity," "progress," and national identities. Terence O'Neill irreparably upended Northern Irish political culture. As the province crept further towards social dissolution, it simultaneously greeted the wide, brilliant, and indefinite horizons of the post-war world.

Chapter I: The Anguish of Reform in Early Northern Irish Politics

The Problem of Ulster Unionism

From the foundation of the Northern Irish state in 1921, until 1963, the province witnessed an almost unchanged political system. The locally dominant principle of Ulster unionism argued that Northern Ireland should remain an inseparable part of the United Kingdom. To many within unionism's Protestant base, significant political change threatened to destabilize this constitutional position. Between the early 1920s and the early 1960s, political change died in the stagnant waters of Unionist Party rule. Successive Northern Irish governments prioritized safeguarding the region's constitutional attachment to the United Kingdom above all else. A discriminatory ethnoreligious state suited the needs of Ulster's political elite, if it meant retaining that bond.³¹ Over time, however, the Northern Irish population witnessed slowing economic growth, unemployment, and broad frustration against reigning political traditions by the middle of the twentieth century. Up to the Second World War and into the early post-war era, Northern Ireland's politics were an undisturbed morass. Systematic change was not destined by the early 1960s, yet nor would the political status quo remain in place. As Northern Ireland's economic fortunes contrasted the speedy development of mainland Britain, Ulster unionists and Irish nationalists expressed desire for political change all the same.³²

In this way, as the post-war years marched on, the unproductive discourse of regional politics exposed how necessary institutional reforms had become. However, neither community

³¹ For a more thorough examination of Ulster unionism's violent, culturally focused, and overwhelmingly identitarian origins, see Graham Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party*, particularly 1-36.

³² For studies that depict the outbreak of the Troubles as the (supposedly inevitable) product of "tribalism" and longue durée ethnoreligious animosities, see Bardon, *A History of Ulster*. Cochrane, "Meddling at the Crossroads." And Rose, *How the Troubles Came to Northern Ireland*.

agreed on the extent or pace of these reforms. Different ideological camps festered within the unionist community, in particular, and this controversy later complicated the execution of socioeconomic change in the 1960s and beyond. An immobile balance of powers enervated the political system, seemingly inhibiting the possibility of change originating in high politics. Certainly, demand for some political reforms—such as modern industrial economic policies, to compete within increasingly globalized world economy—seemed all but universal. However, longstanding issues like political discrimination and the Unionist Party’s emphasis on communal separation would not end without duress. Changes to this political culture seemed tantalizingly close during the 1950s and 1960s, just as they appeared too distant to achieve in the immediate present. Case in point, the hegemony of unionist politics produced a weak opposition in Northern Ireland; yet the weakness of opposition parties meant that political change was more likely to arrive from within Unionist Party ranks. Nevertheless, the leaders who tried to execute such change also faced intransigent resistance from a conservative party base. While decaying political traditions legitimized reformism in regional politics during the early post-war era, historical sectarianism complicated this push for change, sowing the seeds of a painful political transition that forever altered life in Northern Ireland.

A Divided State: Northern Irish Politics from Partition to the 1960s

The history of unionism in Northern Ireland is as intricate as unionism itself, for at its core, this set of principles began as an ideology, and not a political system. As the debate over Home Rule bifurcated Ireland’s sectarian populations, leading Protestant politicians carried their influence in the North through fear. Figures such as Edward Carson, Unionist Party leader from 1910 to 1921, disseminated the notion that a Catholic-dominated Home Rule Ireland would not only sever Protestants’ ties to the United Kingdom, but absolve the unique cultural lineaments of

the Ulster Protestant population.³³ Some scholars have noted how Ulster unionism began by invoking the shared heritage of Protestant people living in Ireland. However, it also emerged from a point of tension. As Carson and others fabricated the mythos of a distinct Ulster Protestant identity, however, exclusionary rhetoric dominated political life in the region more than did encouragements of Britishness. A proper unionist was against Home Rule, and they fended off Catholic incursion against Protestant autonomy; they spurned the newfound Irish Republic, and they opposed changes to the so-called Protestant way of life.³⁴ This oppositional stance won high esteem in the Protestant population of Ulster, over 470,000 of whom signed the Ulster Covenant of 1912, which denounced the authority of a potential Home Rule Parliament in Dublin.³⁵ At the prodding of their political leadership, Ulster Protestants began to imagine themselves at siege. Any Roman Catholic was a potential enemy. These divided communities formed the basis of the new Northern Irish statelet in 1921, after the Partition of Ireland. Unionist identity became an unwelcoming fortress, and defensive-minded intransigence dominated unionist politics for decades onwards.

Over time, this fear of incursion against the Protestant population by an all-Ireland Catholic majority nurtured suspicion that the Catholic community was a threat to Protestant peoples' well-being, turning Catholics into second-class citizens. The divisive rhetoric of Edward Carson, and later that of Northern Ireland's first Prime Minister, James Craig, formed a legacy of terror. Even after the Northern Irish state emerged to defend Protestant interests, its place seemed insecure to much of the religious majority. The prospect of a Catholic takeover

³³ Graham Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party*, 1, 6.

³⁴ Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party*, 2, 5-6, 25, 34-35. Mac Laughlin and Agnew, "Hegemony and the Regional Question," 252, 259.

³⁵ "About the Ulster Covenant," *NIDirect*, accessed 18 January 2020, <https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/articles/about-ulster-covenant>.

was ever on the horizon. The minority population became a symbol of disloyalty—because they were not British, “not like us.” Many Protestants assumed them to be enemies unless proven otherwise.³⁶ Although Protestants were the dominant population within Northern Ireland, their minority status in the island as a whole provoked deep-set anxiety in the Northern Irish political class. The 1937 Constitution of Ireland’s ideal for a unified republic across “the whole island of Ireland,” in addition to Ireland’s 1948 departure from the Commonwealth, only compounded the outlook of unionist politicians.³⁷ As a direct result of the Protestant community’s fears, unionist politicians used their position to defend that of Protestants within Northern Ireland. An unrestrained Protestant paramilitary force in the Royal Special Constabulary, a Protestant-run judiciary system, and public sector workers’ mandatory oaths of allegiance to the Crown were preemptive defensive tools. The figures in Stormont who conceived of this system intended to simultaneously safeguard Protestants and silence the voices of allegedly violent Catholics.³⁸ Ironically, these measures further constrained the social conditions and political horizons of the Catholic community. The imagined grievances of Protestants created a sectarian state ideology that formed genuine, pressing grievances for the minority population. The tension from these conditions would escalate until, at last, they burst onto the stage of the 1960s.

London’s declining relationship with Stormont throughout the early twentieth century accelerated ongoing discrimination in Northern Ireland, as the British government’s negligence towards Ulster affairs tacitly justified the Unionist Party’s unchecked rule. In the first two decades of the twentieth century, the Unionist Party of Northern Ireland was, in effect, a regional

³⁶ Bell, *The Irish Troubles*, 24, 71. Cochrane, “Why Politics Failed and Violence Began,” 34-35.

³⁷ Bunreacht na hÉireann (Constitution of Ireland), Articles 2 and 3, 1937, <https://celt.ucc.ie/published/E900003-005/text002.html>. Thomas Hennessey, *Northern Ireland: The Origins of the Troubles* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 2005), x-xi. Ken Bloomfield, *Stormont in Crisis: A Memoir* (Belfast: The Blackstaff Press, 1994), 66. Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945*, 31.

³⁸ Geoffrey Bell, *The Protestants of Ulster* (London: Pluto Press, 1976), 39-40.

arm of the larger Conservative Party. Beginning with Partition, however, the devolved status of Northern Ireland left British Tories more and more unconcerned with the governance or political traditions of that province. As British Conservatism remolded itself under nebulous “English” cultural values, the sectarian Ulster identity of unionist politics became increasingly unhelpful towards advancing Conservative Party interests in Britain.³⁹ A mere five Unionists served as parliamentary secretaries or private secretaries in Westminster from 1921 to 1970.⁴⁰ The Conservative Party had not just left Northern Ireland alone—English Tories and Toryism had all but forgotten the region. At the same time, the mainland Labour Party’s absent cooperation with Stormont added to an escalating cultural divide that split the islands. The dearth of contact between Ulster Unionists and British Labour forces created a pitiful misunderstanding among the two parties. Even before the civil rights movement emerged, Unionist leaders in the 1960s tended to see the Labour Party as faceless agents of spectral Socialism, spoken of in similarly grim terms as the revolutionary leftism of Irish Republican movements.⁴¹ British disinterest had fostered a stark independent streak in Northern Ireland. Until the region produced leadership who eagerly sought to bring their region into conversation with British politics, the affairs of the distant province would remain obscured in—and unchecked by—Great Britain.

Left to their own devices, successive Unionist governments employed legal repression to quell a potential Catholic uprising, creating a police state that grew more and more in need of reform. In 1922, Stormont instituted the Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act, which granted an almost unrestricted range of action to the regional policing force, led by the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). The text of the Act stipulated that its regulations intended to uphold

³⁹ Smith, ““Ever Reliable Friends’?,” 70, 75-78, 81-83.

⁴⁰ Harrison, *Seeking a Role*, 427.

⁴¹ Minutes Book of the Ulster Unionist Council, 8 April 1965, 6 October 1965, D1327/22/3. “Strength of Unionism is Reaffirmed: Ulster Unionist Council Annual Report for 1966,” 18-19, PM/5/31/31.

“peace and order” throughout the province, above all else. The tone of Northern Irish politics thereafter was clear: stability would be the watchword of government, and human rights would remain on the wayside.⁴² Rather than promote the political integration of Roman Catholic citizens, the Special Powers Act implicitly made them a pariah of the state. Unrestricted eminent domain, household inspections, arrests, and personal search and seizure actions all characterized Stormont’s community relations policy.⁴³ Making matters worse for the Catholic population, Northern Ireland harbored a de facto paramilitary police force in the form of the Ulster Special Constabulary. Though not granted the same legal powers as the RUC, a subsidiary of this organization, the “B Specials,” all but allowed any male Protestant applicant the right to own a gun, adding to the general terror that surrounded Catholic society in Northern Ireland.⁴⁴ With the Special Powers Act renewed each year by Stormont, the Catholic population’s attempts to promote civic change risked not only legal discrimination, but injury or even death. The need and desire for systematic change grew in concert with everyday legal and physical violence. Discrimination became the norm of regional life.

With an insular Protestant leadership in control of Northern Ireland’s economic powers, divergent material and social investment in the province set up an exceedingly difficult communal divide by the 1960s. The apex of cultural tensions which brewed in that decade had their roots in even older historical processes. Sociocultural organizations such as the Ulster Unionist Labour Association, the Apprentice Boys of Derry, and the ancient Orange Order rallied elite and working-class Protestants under the same cultural umbrella. Wielding large

⁴² “Civil Authorities (Special Powers) Act (Northern Ireland), 1922,” *CAIN*, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hms0/spa1922.htm>.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ Maurice Irvine, *Northern Ireland: Faith and Faction* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 115. *The Cameron Report*, 9, *CAIN*, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/hms0/cameron.htm>.

memberships across the economic spectrum, these groups crowded Roman Catholics out of both private and public sector employment.⁴⁵ With very few exceptions, political and economic advancement belonged to Protestants alone, and poverty became a normal element of Northern Irish Catholic experiences. Where Stormont lacked jurisdiction in certain areas, such as housing, local authorities stepped in to discriminate. Until the late 1960s, Northern Irish council administrations determined both public house rents and housing allocation. Due to longstanding gerrymandering of council wards, these largely Unionist Party-controlled councils clustered many Catholics into overwhelmed slums. In cities such as Dungannon, a Catholic family could be on a housing waiting list for more than ten years.⁴⁶ This sectarian hegemony now added a class divide onto the extant legal and cultural subjugation that characterized provincial life. As Protestants controlled not only the flow of labor, but that of capital, too, economic investment naturally traveled to largely Protestant and urban areas before anywhere else.⁴⁷ Worth noting, however, was that this pattern of economic growth discriminated against rural Protestants almost, if not as much, as rural Catholics. Closing factories and housing deficits as a result of greater urban development affected both communities.⁴⁸ The Ulster state did not deliver to all its supposedly first-class citizens. By midcentury, fractures began to appear in Northern Ireland's Protestant hegemony.

⁴⁵ Mac Laughlin and John A. Agnew, "Hegemony and the Regional Question," 252, 255. Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party*, 2. Bob Rowthorn, "Northern Ireland: An Economy in Crisis," *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 5, no. 1 (1981): 2, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23596652>. Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945*, 93.

⁴⁶ David Bowman and Lynne Shivers. *More than the Troubles: A Common Sense View of the Northern Ireland Conflict* (Philadelphia: New Society Publishers, 1984), 60. Cochrane, "Why Politics Failed and Violence Began," 39-40. Patterson, *Ireland since 1939*, 139.

⁴⁷ John Bradley, "The History of Economic Development in Northern Ireland, North and South," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 98 (1999): 50, 59, 62, <https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/sites/default/files/98p035.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Mac Laughlin and John A. Agnew, "Hegemony and the Regional Question," 251. Rowthorn, "Northern Ireland: An Economy in Crisis," 1.

The longstanding political status quo in Northern Ireland created tremendous stagnancy in the country, and the lethargic Premiership of Lord Brookeborough, Northern Ireland's third Prime Minister, opened up public desire across the communal divide for a more active, "progressive" government. Serving in office from 1943 to 1963, Brookeborough's time in office captured the unionist ideal of stability. His Ministry guaranteed moderate industrial investment throughout the early post-war era, and he himself towed the typical party community relations line. Catholics remained a non-factor in government policy. To many Protestants, Brookeborough was seemingly an inoffensive and moderate leader, explaining his extended time in the Premiership.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, the unassuming qualities of the Brookeborough Ministry also left it uninspiring, if not inert. His overseas speeches and diplomatic visits—largely isolated to the United States and Canada—were feeble at best, and he often had more memorable encounters with anti-Partitionists in North America than he did with Ulster loyalists.⁵⁰ Granted, Brookeborough's designs never seemed to be greater than securing party unity. Up to his last days in office, that goal captured his public rhetoric with far greater tenor than did any one direction in which he sought to take his province.⁵¹ This enervated approach to leadership—an almost overwhelming focus on maintaining the peace—guaranteed that the Northern Irish economy suffered by the end of his Premiership. While Brookeborough did subsidize certain local industries, this approach did not halt ongoing industrial decline.⁵² Unemployment continued to beleaguer the province. By the end of the Brookeborough Ministry, the unemployment rate was a depressingly high 7.4%, and the issue dominated parliamentary

⁴⁹ Seamus Smyth, "In Defence of Ulster: The Visit of Sir Basil Brooke to North America, Spring 1950," *The Canadian Journal of Irish Studies* 33, no. 2 (2007): 10, doi:10.2307/25515674. Gordon, *The O'Neill Years*, 8.

⁵⁰ Smyth, "In Defence of Ulster," 10, 12-17.

⁵¹ UUC Yearbook 1963, D1327/20/1/27.

⁵² Peled Yoav and Natalie Kosoi, "Northern Ireland: The Pitfalls of Populism," in *The Challenge of Ethnic Democracy: The State and Minority Groups in Israel, Poland and Northern Ireland* (London: Routledge, 2014), 47. Bloomfield, *Stormont in Crisis*, 63-65.

debate.⁵³ Discontent festered within both the Catholic and Protestant communities. As the Ulster state proved itself ever more ineffective, a growing public chorus called out for dynamic and bold leadership.

The Phantom Opposition of Early Post-War Northern Ireland

The disorganization of opposition forces by the early 1960s made it so that necessary political reform would have to come from within the Unionist Party, as the Catholic-oriented Nationalist Party championed moderate economic change over ending immediate social discrimination. The party's political idealism was excessive, for it inhibited Nationalist politicians from fomenting systematic change within Stormont. For example, until 1965, Nationalists refused to serve as the Official Opposition despite consistently having the second most seats at Parliament.⁵⁴ Instead of altering Northern Irish politics through direct action, Nationalist Leadership elected to reject it altogether—outside of abstentionism. For all the ideological weight this uncooperative stance with Ulster unionism carried, the Nationalist Party far from alleviated the living conditions of their constituents. As party leaders chose to abstain from official opposition politics, Nationalists never achieved significant numbers in Parliament. After securing a high of eleven seats to Stormont in 1929, the organization never maintained more than ten MPs in the 52-member body at a given time.⁵⁵ If the Unionist Party suffered from political stagnancy, it could at least organize coherent support across the province. Even

⁵³ Parliamentary Debates, House of Commons of Northern Ireland, *The Stormont Papers*, 28 March 1963, <http://stormontpapers.ahds.ac.uk/pageview.html>. Aaron Edwards, "The Labour Opposition of Northern Ireland, 1958–65," in *A History of the Northern Ireland Labour Party: Democratic Socialism and Sectarianism* (Manchester UP, 2009), 87, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt155jfvn.10>.

⁵⁴ Brendan Lynn, "Revising Northern Nationalism, 1960-1965: The Nationalist Party's Response," *New Hibernia Review/Iris Éireannach Nua* 4, no. 3 (2000): 89-90, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20646313>.

⁵⁵ David Boothroyd, "Northern Ireland Parliamentary Election Results," *United Kingdom Election Results*, accessed 7 September 2019, <http://www.election.demon.co.uk/stormont/totals.html>.

considering electoral discrimination that characterized Northern Irish politics, the Nationalist Party's inability to cull Catholic political apathy was egregious beyond compare.

Furthermore, where the Nationalists' messaging floundered, their local organization proved amateurish as well. By 1965, the government of the Irish Republic had soured on their potential Northern ally. In a memorandum to then-Irish Premier Seán Lemass, the Irish Minister for External Affairs, Frank Aiken, related that a recent meeting with the Nationalist Party leader had given cause for Republicans' concern. Aiken bemoaned the Northern Irish party's insufficient ground organization. Lacking a high enough number of local party clubs to affect the hearts and minds of Northern Irish people, Aiken believed, the Nationalist Party could not yet "engage in effective political action."⁵⁶ Although Aiken suggested that Dublin discuss economic relations with Nationalist Party leaders, the Minister warned that such meetings should not eclipse bilateral meetings between Dublin and the Unionist government.⁵⁷ Even Fianna Fáil—the leading Republican party of the South—recognized that, by necessity, the potential for positive change in Northern Ireland rested among Unionists. The Nationalist Party was almost irrelevant.

Compounding the Nationalists' case to force institutional change was the party's tepid attitude towards sectarian discrimination, injuring its wider appeal to a disgruntled Catholic population. Though the party began with the ultimate goal of creating an all-Ireland Republic, by the 1950s significant party figures, such as Tom and Paddy Gormley, tried to realign the organization's appeal. Their parliamentary rhetoric would champion the cause of the

⁵⁶ Frank Aiken to Seán Lemass, 27 January 1965, 1-2, CAIN, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/bibdb/authorbib.htm>.

⁵⁷ Frank Aiken to Seán Lemass, 27 January 1965, 2.

economically disadvantaged.⁵⁸ Police brutality and other forms of government discrimination still remained in the Nationalist purview, but these talking points were less elevated than the more inoffensive issue of class inequality, which affected Protestants as well as Catholics. Rather than embrace an outright non-sectarian approach, however, the Nationalist Party never rescinded its support for Irish reunification. Philosophically disjointed, the party seemed to have lost its way. The party's leading figureheads made no effort to convince Northern Irish Catholics otherwise. In Stormont during the early 1960s, aging Nationalist parliamentarians such as Cahir Healy and J. F. Stewart railed against economic scarcity in their home constituencies. Rarely did they accuse the government of religious discrimination.⁵⁹ In this way, most Nationalist politicians made no effort to change the culture of Northern Irish politics. The absence of coherent voices against discrimination in Stormont, throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, ensured that tensions within the Roman Catholic community only grew over time. Anti-establishment sentiment would soon overwhelm the mild musings of Nationalist Party politicians. As Unionist Party leaders received free rein to govern as they saw fit, grassroots Catholic political action emerged in the wake of the Nationalists' decline. If politics would not change from outside of the Unionist establishment, change would have to come from within. The province needed a figurehead who could champion the end of religious tribalism. By 1963, Terence O'Neill emerged to take up this reformist banner—yet not with the anti-sectarian agenda for which many Catholics had hoped.

Granted, early post-war Northern Irish politics offered an ostensibly nonsectarian political force in the form of the Northern Irish Labour Party (NILP), whose broad appeals to

⁵⁸ Christopher Norton, "The Sinn Féin Challenge and the Birth of the Nationalist Party, 1955–59," in *The Politics of Constitutional Nationalism in Northern Ireland, 1932–70: Between Grievance and Reconciliation* (New York: Manchester UP, 2014), 128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt1mf70w2.11>.

⁵⁹ *Stormont Papers*, 11 June 1963, 1405; 2 July 1963, 2086-7; 24 June 1965, 1203-4.

working-class Catholics and Protestants came close to threatening the Unionist hegemony.

Unlike the Nationalist Party, the NILP dared to expose Northern Ireland's quasi-apartheid state for what it was. The party never commanded significant numbers in Stormont—their best performance, in 1962, brought them only four seats with 25% of the popular vote.⁶⁰

Nevertheless, they had proven their cross-communal attraction. Labour MPs drew support from mixed Catholic and Protestant urbanites, and the party campaigned in Unionist and Nationalist strongholds all the same.⁶¹ Slightly, ever so slightly, the NILP sapped away at the Unionist electoral monolith. One explanation for the NILP's relatively high popular support in Northern Ireland was their ability to articulate progressive material and cultural policy points. Not only did they advocate for the typical labor-friendly economic positions, but they triumphed political reform in general. NILP MPs railed against unevenly distributed economic investment, gerrymandering, and voting discrimination. Crucially, they often accentuated the sectarian nature of these issues, highlighting the maltreatment of Catholic citizens.⁶² The party's 1965 campaign manifesto denounced what it saw as the government's disinterest towards "the genuine grievances of the minority," positioning Labour, by contrast, as "wholly non-sectarian."⁶³ As opposed to its Nationalist Party rivals, who shied away from explicitly demanding immediate institutional change in Northern Ireland's political system, the NILP committed to a genuine cross-communal platform. If not for its fatal decision to enter into the constitutional question, the party seemed poised to reshape regional politics altogether.

Despite the NILP's broadly non-sectarian image, its post-war decision to support Partition inhibited its ability to escape the traditional sectarian folds of Northern Irish political

⁶⁰ Boothroyd, "Northern Ireland Parliamentary Election Results."

⁶¹ Mulholland, *Terence O'Neill*, 23. Edwards, "The Labour Opposition of Northern Ireland," 91.

⁶² *Stormont Papers*, 14 December 1965, 49; 21 October 1965, 2417.

⁶³ "Election Manifesto, 1965: Northern Ireland Labour Party," D3233/1/5.

culture, causing the party to flounder by the mid-1960s, and opening the way for a more dynamic Unionist government instead. In 1949, the NILP executive committee voted to confirm the party's official stance in favor of Northern Ireland remaining a United Kingdom nation.⁶⁴ This decision to eschew constitutional neutrality set an inherent limit to the party's electoral support. As a philosophically unionist party, it would never accrue the favor of staunch Republicans, no matter how compelling the NILP's economic messaging was. Even while it gained popular support throughout the 1950s and into the 1960s, the party's voting bloc remained precariously scattered throughout the region. In 1965, for instance, one of the two Stormont constituencies it held at the time was at risk of being dissolved through new boundary legislation. And, only as late as December 1968 did the NILP seem to consider investing in a party machine in Derry, the more heavily Catholic of Northern Ireland's two cities.⁶⁵ Though systematic factors dampened the NILP's potential influence, the party's own erroneous actions damaged their prospects most of all. By 1965, the party's vote and parliamentary seat share had sunken considerably, losing at the cost of the Unionist Party's gains.⁶⁶ All political capital rested in Northern Ireland's dominant party, once again. Any substantive effort to dismantle standing political traditions—or double-down on the same—would come from the unionist community alone.

Pursuing this idea further, anxiety concerning the political establishment was not unique to the Catholic population, for the grassroots activism of Northern Irish Protestants distinguished a cultural divide between traditional loyalism and the emerging “progressive” unionism.

Decades after the foundation of a Protestant ethnostate in Northern Ireland, the provincial siege

⁶⁴ Aaron Edwards, “Social Democracy and Partition: The British Labour Party and Northern Ireland, 1951-64,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 42, no. 4 (2007): 598, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30036471>.

⁶⁵ “Flop Ends Labour Hope in Stormont,” *Evening Press* (Dublin), 26 November 1965; Minutes of Executive Committee [Northern Ireland Labour Party], 13 December, 1968, D3233/1/5.

⁶⁶ Boothroyd, “Northern Ireland Parliamentary Election Results.”

mentality never abated. Those who feared incursion against the mythic Protestant way of life found their leader in the form of Ian Paisley. A bellowing evangelical minister from East Belfast, Paisley dabbled in social organization as early as 1951, when he established his own church in Belfast, appealing to working class unionists.⁶⁷ Equally skilled in social perception and oratory, Paisley did not limit himself to theological commentary. His liturgical following gave him a strong base from which to branch out into loyalist society, slowly converting working-class Protestants from Belfast and beyond into a latent unionist vanguard. Beginning in the early 1960s, he molded himself into a symbol of loyalist resistance against perceived slights from Roman Catholics and “disloyal” Protestants alike. Throughout that turbulent decade, Paisley became an icon of Protestant concern: He formed the *Protestant Telegraph* newspaper, ostensibly to challenge the establishment mindset of the *Belfast Telegraph*; he sowed public outrage against shows of Irish nationalism over incidents as isolated as the raising of an Irish tricolor; and, he organized massive loyalist rallies, waging a shadow war against the perceived antagonism of liberal and Irish Republican forces.⁶⁸ One cannot underestimate the role Ian Paisley had in shaping the dialogue of post-war Ulster politics. Political lethargy and the weakness of Northern Ireland’s opposition encouraged Unionist-led changes involving the regional government. However, a surging loyalist movement ensured that any reforms which emerged in the 1960s would not come without tremendous Protestant resistance. While the rise of a reformer seemed destined, their success was anything but.

⁶⁷ Mulholland, *Terence O’Neill*, 19.

⁶⁸ Andrew Boyd, “1964: The Tricolour Riots,” in *Holy War in Belfast*, *CAIN*, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/bibdbs/authorbib.htm>. Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, 26, 32. Hennessy, *Northern Ireland: The Origin of the Troubles*, 5. Bloomfield, *Stormont in Crisis*, 77. Many of Paisley’s rallies during the 1960s incorporated religious revivalism and political commentary; see, for example, “Orange Drumhead Service at Dundrum, Co. Down,” 10 July 1966; or, Francis A. Reid to Hugo Black, 31 August 1966, 1-2, both deposited in CAB/9/B/300/2A.

At the Cusp of Change

The stubborn continuation of Partition-era statecraft provided frustrating levels of political inaction to the Northern Irish population of the early 1960s. From Craig to Brookeborough, maintaining sectarian tensions at the forefront of political discourse suited the status quo mindset of Northern Ireland's Prime Ministers. Stagnancy meant stability, and stability guaranteed that the Irish Republic would not encroach upon the North. Through a profusion of "law and order" rhetoric from the 1920s onwards, Unionist politicians stoked the flames of sectarian hatred. Both Protestants and Catholics suffered as a result. The unchanging political system of Northern Ireland dragged the province down as it entered into the post-war and Cold War eras. Repression of the minority population could not distract from slacking economic development, and static social and economic policies hindered Northern Ireland's becoming a full participant in the global community. Until 1963, few if any Unionist leaders attempted to live out this potential. This stagnancy soon came to an end. As institutional political change arrived, however, the ramifications of decades-old socioeconomic inequality burst across Northern Ireland.

Chapter II: Making Ulster Modern

Our task will be literally to transform the face of Ulster.⁶⁹

A Dark Horse in Ulster Unionism

What more can be said about the man who led Northern Ireland as it descended into chaos? Scholarship has long argued that Terence O'Neill's legacy was one of failure, but there was more to Northern Ireland's fourth Prime Minister than defeat.⁷⁰ With a penchant for ambition, O'Neill sought to expand his country's political horizons as none had done before. Neither his successes as Premier nor his decline followed a straight and narrow path, however. His circuitous quest for a better, happier region began at a moment when worldwide geopolitical trends crept to the forefront of provincial life. Northern Ireland in the early 1960s was at the juncture of change. Although O'Neill's Unionist Party had governed the province for some forty years up to that point, its static hegemony would not last. The legacy of the Second World War and the dawning of the Cold War brought opportunities for Northern Ireland to reshape itself into an ideal "modern" society. O'Neill recognized this potential. Upon acceding to the Premiership, he challenged the province's political lethargy. Through firm-handed leadership he would employ economic and diplomatic intervention to reimagine Northern Ireland's place in the post-war world, and to change the structure of Northern Irish society. In this same vein, though, his narrow-minded and unflinching modernization scheme failed to account for the intricate

⁶⁹ Terence O'Neill, "Speech to the Annual Meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council," 5 April 1963, INF/3/3/24.

⁷⁰ For especially critical examinations of Terence O'Neill's leadership, see: Paul Bew, Peter Gibbon, and Henry Patterson, *The State in Northern Ireland, 1921-1972: Political Forces and Social Classes* (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1979). Feargal Cochrane, "Meddling at the Crossroads." David Gordon, *The O'Neill Years*. Henry Patterson, *Ireland since 1939*. Bob Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*. And Graham Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party*.

ethnoreligious dynamics that beleaguered the province—dooming his idealistic plan to incompleteness.

Terence O’Neill was destined to tread a maverick path. He was born on September 10th, 1914, the third son of Arthur O’Neill, an Ulsterman, and Lady Annabel Crewe-Milnes, an English aristocrat. Initially raised in London, the future Premier’s childhood set him on a life course that diverged from that of a typical Northern Irish politician. His education at a private school in Winchester and later at Eton affirmed his exclusive British upbringing. While O’Neill’s father—a Westminster MP for Mid Antrim who died in battle at the outbreak of the First World War—came from a prestigious Northern Irish political family, the son imbibed English culture during his early life. Following his mother’s remarriage in 1922, O’Neill spent a year in Ethiopia with his family, and as a young man he traveled to Germany to develop his foreign language proficiency. For all his dotting upon his elite Ulster pedigree, O’Neill grew up far removed from the ideas and conversations that ruled contemporary Northern Irish Protestant society.⁷¹ This difference meant that he lacked the same values that characterized the men and women whom he would represent years later. A professed Anglican entering the political domain of Calvinist Presbyterians, O’Neill proved an outsider from the onset.⁷² Though he would ascend regional politics soon after settling permanently in Northern Ireland, his worldview was forever at odds from those that dominated the province.

Fittingly, only tremendous crisis brought O’Neill into the fold of Northern Irish politics. He joined the Irish Guards at the outbreak of the Second World War, serving in England, France,

⁷¹ Terence O’Neill, *The Autobiography of Terence O’Neill: Prime Minister of Northern Ireland, 1963-1969* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1972), 1-5, 8, 17.

⁷² Ken Bloomfield, *A Tragedy of Errors: The Government and Misgovernment of Northern Ireland* (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 2007), 168.

and the Netherlands from 1940 to 1944.⁷³ Both of his brothers died in the conflict. Their father having been killed on the frontlines of the First World War, Terence O'Neill was the sole child left to take up his patriarch's political mantle. O'Neill moved towards this role after he received a wound near Nijmegen, which forced him to recuperate in England in late 1944.⁷⁴ Having married Jean Whitaker earlier that year, he and his wife soon moved to O'Neill's familial county of Antrim. Like his father before him, O'Neill was a Unionist Party loyalist. In November 1946, after having previously failed to receive his party's nomination for two open seats, O'Neill won a by-election to the Northern Irish Parliament's Bannside constituency, unopposed, beginning an active public career that would endure for 23 years.⁷⁵ Merely two months later the political neophyte distinguished his pragmatic philosophy from the sectarian and uncompromising party ranks. In his maiden speech at Stormont, the regional parliament building, O'Neill defended a government education bill that included grants for Catholic voluntary schools. The young member from Bannside voiced his opinion that the bill would bring Northern Ireland in line with mainland United Kingdom law, and so help Northern Irish people "carry out this British way of life."⁷⁶ He imagined himself to be a unionist first, and a Protestant second. This priority naturally put O'Neill at odds with various party leaders, and his elevation within party politics came at a slow tread. However, in 1956, after O'Neill had spent nine years as a backbench MP and parliamentary secretary, then-Premier Lord Brookeborough appointed him Minister of Home Affairs. O'Neill's personal fortunes bloomed further that year when he became Minister of Finance. In this role, he demarcated himself as a competent if quiet

⁷³ O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 21-23.

⁷⁴ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 190. O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 25.

⁷⁵ O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 22, 25-26.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 28-30.

public servant.⁷⁷ While his rise within the party hierarchy soon halted yet again, circumstance would elevate O'Neill in the years to come.

By early 1963, Lord Brookeborough's failing health opened up generational change in Northern Ireland, leading O'Neill to the summit of Ulster politics. The aging Brookeborough's nearly twenty-year long tenure as party leader was ending; nevertheless, he showed himself unwilling to name a preferred successor.⁷⁸ Brookeborough thus left the Unionist Party without a clear leader. As a result, the Governor of Northern Ireland at the time, Lord Wakehurst, selected the new Prime Minister that March. His choice was Terence O'Neill. While Wakehurst's rationale for appointing O'Neill as Premier remains murky, it is possible that O'Neill's youthful public face opposite Brookeborough's—in addition to the young MP's moderate unionism and his familiarity with administrative affairs—made him seem an inoffensive selection. As a result, he overcame several establishment candidates for the leadership who were arguably more prominent in the party, including then-Home Affairs Minister Brian Faulkner.⁷⁹ The Ulster Unionist Council Standing Committee elected O'Neill to the party leadership soon after. Because of this fact, he had no mandate from the parliamentary party. Still, O'Neill experienced a relatively warm grace period soon after becoming Premier, as Unionists and Nationalists alike sent him well wishes during his first appearance in parliament as Prime Minister. This gentle welcome was not to last.⁸⁰ Upon his appointment to lead the Northern Irish government, O'Neill struck more ties with Stormont bureaucrats, such as his private secretary Kenneth Bloomfield,

⁷⁷ O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 31-36.

⁷⁸ Marc Mulholland, "'One of The Most Difficult Hurdles': The Struggle for Recognition of the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions, 1958-1964," *Saothar* 22 (1997): 84, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23198643>. O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 41-42, 62-63.

⁷⁹ O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 42.

⁸⁰ UUC Yearbook 1963, D1327/20/1/27. (By early 1963, the UUC Standing Committee was an amalgamation mainly of Unionist Peers and local party association representatives.) *Stormont Papers*, 28 March 1963, 29, 47-48.

than with members of Parliament.⁸¹ This feeble intra-parliamentary relationship led the Premier to draw his initiatives from outside the sectarian Unionist base. With Stormont's policy arm outside the control of Orangeism, a sea change followed in Northern Irish politics.

Making Unionism Modern

Upon securing the Premiership, O'Neill outlined his vision to advance Northern Ireland's place in the world by empowering its economic foundation and inspiring its population with regional civic pride. The trailblazing Ulster Premier attempted to change the language of regional politics. Through both public appearances and policy proposals, he positioned sectarian identities as relics of a failed national past, and he attempted to engender broad consumer and regional identities in order to stabilize Northern Irish society.⁸² Granted, O'Neill's vision for a secular and progressive Northern Irish culture could not and would not attract all parts of his constituency. As long as fear of the sectarian Other persisted, consumer society would remain a fleeting dream.

On April 5th, 1963, in his first official speech to the Unionist Party membership, the newly minted Prime Minister announced his plan to restructure Northern Irish society by improving its material well-being. Before the Ulster Unionist Council, the Premier declared he would initiate a several decades long process of change.⁸³ With beaming, confident airs, he exuded a vision of provincial renewal. Referencing the Stormont-produced 1963 Matthew Plan, which advocated for urbanization outside of Belfast, O'Neill articulated new possibilities for the

⁸¹ Bloomfield, *Stormont in Crisis*, 27-29, 62, 74. O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 23, 35. Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party*, 154. Wichert, *Northern Ireland since 1945*, 86-87.

⁸² Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*, x, 6-7, 19. Cash, "Taking Ideology Seriously," 16. Roger H. Hull, "Myth and Reality: The Conflict in Northern Ireland from Three Perspectives," in *The Irish Triangle: Conflict in Northern Ireland* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1976), 42. Graham Walker, "Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Devolution, 1945-1979," *Journal of British Studies* 49, no. 1 (2010): 128, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/27752693>.

⁸³ Terence O'Neill, "Speech to the Annual Meeting of the Ulster Unionist Council," 5 April 1963, INF/3/3/24, 2, 4.

Northern Irish landscape: “Think of it—a great, new modern city of 100,000 in mid-Ulster, planned to be a complete contrast to the accumulation of decades of haphazard development elsewhere in the Province.”⁸⁴ With sweeping goals such as this, O’Neill dreamed of revitalizing Northern Ireland’s political and social traditions. He saw a future province that championed orderliness, material wealth, and urban success. By employing grandiose visions of the Ulster-to-be, O’Neill sought to galvanize the civic engagement of his constituents by inspiring them to pursue shared goals of growth and prosperity. The Prime Minister would turn back to this image of a successful urban-industrial society throughout his time in office. For him, only a society that harnessed all its resources would be a merit to the modern world.

The centerpiece of O’Neill’s socioeconomic agenda was to further Northern Ireland’s industrial development, since by creating a consumer-industrial society, he might turn the province into a stable and successful member of the global economy. A skilled workforce at full employment centered O’Neill’s notion of economic modernization. As he declared before Stormont on December 14th, 1965, the focus of his economic transformation scheme was, “to provide 65,000 new jobs within the period 1964-1970—30,000 in manufacturing industry, 30,000 in the service trades, and 5,000 in construction.” Crucially, O’Neill then suggested that growth in all three sectors would further nurture even more growth in services. From this speech we can best see O’Neill’s overarching desire to create a consumer society in Northern Ireland. Since the Victorian Age, the province had been the dominion of linen manufacturing, as well as a far older agrarian tradition. O’Neill hoped to break the mold of Northern Irish industry. His ultimate focus on the services sector speaks to his desire to modernize Northern Irish production in step with the rest of the Western world, as well as his ambition to enhance Northern Ireland’s

⁸⁴ O’Neill, 5 April 1963 speech, INF/3/3/24, 2.

perception within the international arena. In the same statement to Parliament, O'Neill noted that he would use Northern Ireland's economic transformation to advertise the province abroad, promoting "its suitability as a base for exports around the world; its established success as an international industrial community."⁸⁵ By enhancing Northern Ireland's industrial output, the province might better sell itself to foreign markets. Ulster would in turn become a closer-knit member of Western society.

Domestically, O'Neill saw that material growth from all sectors of the economy could alleviate the collective burdens of Northern Irish society, bringing together populations across the sectarian divide. At the heart of his growth plan was government modernization of infrastructure. During his time in office, O'Neill publicly associated his beliefs with the recent British planning vogue that younger members of the Conservative Party had popularized in the early 1960s. The Premier took particular interest in government planning over urban development.⁸⁶ Ideologically, he placed himself outside the purview of traditional Ulster unionism. His overwhelmingly British political agenda gave him something akin to an angle of repose, through which, he foresaw economic growth as a way to bring all Northern Irish people together. Speaking before the Guild of Freemen of the City of London in late 1963, O'Neill decried the prevalence of untapped geographic wealth across the province. To combat this state of affairs, O'Neill insisted that "the whole nation"—all of Northern Irish society—should come together to develop the province.⁸⁷ Fighting underdevelopment served two purposes in O'Neill's philosophy. On the one hand, this process advanced Northern Ireland's gross economic shortcomings, making it more presentable to the outside world. In an auxiliary way, harnessing

⁸⁵ *Stormont Papers* vol. 62, 14 December 1965, 39.

⁸⁶ "Transcript of Interview with Prime Minister of Northern Ireland on Telefís Éireann," *CAIN*, 10.

⁸⁷ O'Neill, Annual Banquet of the Guild of Freemen of the City of London, 4 December 1963, INF/3/3/32, 3

all human and physical resources also seemed a potent means of healing inter-communal bitterness, which had evidently hampered growth.⁸⁸ We have no indication that O'Neill hoped to demolish the sectarian culture of Northern Irish society, at least in the early stages of his Premiership. Nevertheless, through the physical recreation of the province, he planned to transform its image at home and abroad.

O'Neillism used intensive physical planning as a catalyst by which to transform Northern Ireland's political culture, viewing extensive urban works projects as a crucial step to galvanizing the province's own confidence. Creating a modern Northern Ireland meant urbanization. Noting this point at a reception for Newtownabbey sewage works engineers, in the summer of 1963, O'Neill argued that urban planning served a national imperative to revitalize Northern Ireland's global perception: "We must go out into the world and banish for ever the dreary, harmful picture of Ulster as a distressed, complaining backwater."⁸⁹ The issue of an underdeveloped provincial image gave O'Neill much anxiety, possibly because he saw a negative portrait of Northern Ireland as detrimental to its economic place in the world. Irrespective of his underlying impetus to promote urban development, though, he believed that this trend could fortify Northern Irish peoples' own confidence. The Matthew Plan's recommendation for a new city gave O'Neill this opportunity. Not long after Stormont accepted the plan's recommendations, O'Neill advertised the proposed new city as a paragon of

⁸⁸ The almost communitarian side to O'Neill's economic policies seemingly emerged from his desire to challenge the Northern Irish Labour Party, which from the late 1950s until the 1965 Stormont election, underwent a steady rise in popularity. O'Neill's pro-union, pro-planning, and populist veneer stemmed at least in part from a personal desire to crush the NILP's electoral challenge to unionism. During multiple public appearances, the Premier argued that the Unionist Party, not Labour, was the party of workers and economic security. See O'Neill, speech to annual meeting of the UUC, 5 April 1963, 3, INF/3/3/24; speech to the Bloomfield Unionist Association, 7 November 1963, 1-3, INF/3/3/31. Cf. Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*, 73; Edwards, "The Labour Opposition of Northern Ireland," 88. O'Neill understood that this was a unique moment in Northern Irish history, and he pounced on the opportunity to legitimize changing the Unionist Party through the guise of necessary electoral competition.

⁸⁹ O'Neill, "Dinner by two consulting engineers for a Newtownabbey swage works," 14 August 1963. INF/3/3/28, 1, 4.

enlightened growth. He declared that pursuing its construction would allow Northern Ireland to stand out within Great Britain and Ireland. By creating a new urban center, the province could show off its potential as an innovative, growth-focused region.⁹⁰ One feat of industrial strength would lead to another. In turn, the province would become a symbol of achievement in the modern age.

The divide between O'Neill's dream of a unifying urbanization push and the realities of regional housing discrimination underscores the tensions inherent to O'Neillism, as the Premier's plan failed to account for the systematic inequality plaguing Northern Ireland's political economy. His overwhelming confidence in urban planning led him to overlook its inability to improve the Roman Catholic community's living conditions. By 1965, construction had begun on the new city. Its announced name—Craigavon—was a tribute to James Craig, the first Prime Minister of Northern Ireland and an architect of partition. Beyond the city name's clear entanglement with sectarian history, the project itself brought into question whether the O'Neill Ministry's claim to seek urbanization across all Northern Ireland was genuine.⁹¹ Eddie McAteer, leader of the Nationalist Party in Stormont, interrogated O'Neill as to whether his "urban renewal" would reach the majority-Catholic city of Derry. O'Neill's subtle admission in response to McAteer, that a dearth of urban planners might stall the development of Craigavon, exposed the shortcomings of O'Neill's urban modernization.⁹² Left with scarce human resources, the government championed expanding the region's existing wealth over ameliorating

⁹⁰ *Stormont Papers* vol. 55, 22 October 1963, 37.

⁹¹ O'Neill clearly prioritized party strength, and thus his party's ability to continue its industrialization plan, over equitable growth. Meeting with UUC members in May 1964, meeting minutes describe, he observed "that the Unionist majorities in Armagh had fallen by roughly 5,000 votes over the last 10/12 years and something would have to be done to arrest the situation"—demonstrating that the new city was a way to ensure local Unionist stability as much as modernize Northern Ireland; see Minutes Book of the Ulster Unionist Council, 13 May 1964, D1327/22/3.

⁹² *Stormont Papers* vol. 62, 14 December 1965, 32-44.

its poverty. Slum clearance took official priority over expanded housing until at least late 1968. O'Neill hardly ever noted that housing impoverishment affected Catholics at an egregious level.⁹³ For all his shining rhetoric, the Premier's narrow focus on order and outward appearance left the results of his plans wanting. His dream of altering the physical and social fabric of Northern Ireland found worsening roadblocks the more he sought to impose change.

One Community: Building Bridges in an Age of Division

On the domestic front, the O'Neill Ministry strove for harmony above all else. The Ulster Premier placed improving community relations at the center of his social policies in his drive to create a new Northern Ireland, as he believed that only community stability would allow the province to succeed in the contemporary age. "Order," "peace," and "harmony" remained watchwords throughout his time in office.⁹⁴ O'Neill articulated that social discord would prevent Northern Irish people from utilizing all the economic resources at their disposal. In turn, communal strife—whether political, physical, or otherwise—would hamper the province's development. He warned that both individual well-being and regional economic prosperity were at stake in the fight for harmonious living. O'Neill's emphasis on peaceable social relations and general happiness recalls his desire for a proper Northern Irish consumer society. A quiet, inoffensive population, content with its material well-being, was the terminal goal of government policy.⁹⁵ Thus, any event which O'Neill perceived to undermine Northern Ireland's transition to

⁹³ O'Neill, "Annual General Meeting of the Mid-Antrim Unionist Association," 29 November 1963, INF/3/3/31, 2. O'Neill, "Speech by the Prime Minister at a Housing Conference in Dundonald House," 30 October 1968, CAB/9/N/4/21, 2-5. O'Neill, "Toasting the Northern Ireland Council of Social Services," 27 June 1963, INF/3/3/26, 1. *Stormont Papers*, vol. 58, 27 October 1964, 37.

⁹⁴ Terence O'Neill to Paul Rose, Pat Byrne, Bill Shaughnessy, and Mike Melly (undated), CAB/9/B/205/5, 10. *Stormont Papers* vol. 70, 15 October 1968, 1002. O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 130.

⁹⁵ *Stormont Papers* vol. 62, 14 December 1965, 46-47. Terence O'Neill to Stephen J. Nelson, 1 November 1966, PM/5/7/2. Terence O'Neill, "Dinner by two consulting engineers for a Newtownabbey sewage works, at Midland Hotel, Belfast," INF/3/3/28, 1.

a modern industrial and service-based economy became pure subversion. To solve this issue, the very intellectual fabric of Northern Ireland would have to unite around a shared valued system.

In the process of pursuing economic progress through communal unity, O'Neill attempted to foment ideological uniformity among Catholics and Protestants alike. This universalizing tendency illustrates that his conception of modernization valued stability over tolerance, and cultural regularity over genuine secularism. Speaking at the opening of a Young Unionists think tank center, on October 18th, 1963, the Premier declared that economic modernization would harmonize Northern Irish people. "I have a feeling," he said, "that the Ulster of the future will be more homogenous. Modern communications—particularly, perhaps, television—and the availability of higher education to all will tend to level out some of these differences."⁹⁶ This plan meant smoothing down socioeconomic differences between the two communities—giving Catholics the living conditions afforded to many Protestants. The ideological implications of this process are clear. O'Neill had full faith that he could draw Roman Catholics into the fold of unionism by touting a future Northern Ireland that would be so prosperous that desire for reunification with the Republic of Ireland would dissipate.⁹⁷ O'Neill's inability to appreciate the cultural-political impetus for Irish nationalism not only shows why he proved unable to appeal to Roman Catholics. It also illustrates the materiality of his modernist vision. By his reckoning, economic growth anywhere would uplift Northern Irish people everywhere.

O'Neill's drive to welcome Roman Catholics into consumer society was more than a set of empty gestures, as the Premier used both rhetoric and limited government action to form a

⁹⁶ O'Neill, "Opening of the Young Unionists Week-End Political School, Newcastle, Co. Down," 18 October 1963, INF/3/3/30, 3.

⁹⁷ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 48-49, 55-56.

modern, semi-secular state. He recognized that Northern Irish political culture would have to change before any ministry could legislate to make Catholics truly equal participants in the modern province. In his attempt to make tolerance and cross-communal relations vogue, O'Neill met with Catholics face-to-face. As the head of a state which had discriminated against the nationalist community for decades, O'Neill's meeting with members of the Catholic community was nothing less than revolutionary. This domestic détente eschewed long-established political tradition, as the Unionist Party leadership had historically deigned to associate with the Catholic population. Granted, O'Neill's efforts were unrelated to policy, if polite. From greeting students in Catholic voluntary schools to sending a letter of condolence to the Vatican following the death of Pope John XXIII, the image of reform held more significance to O'Neill than cultural reform proper. By using the publicity afforded to the Premiership, O'Neill felt that he could support a gradual trend towards widespread intercommunal dialogues.⁹⁸ Until the last tumultuous days of his time in office, O'Neill viewed secular style as more impactful than political substance.

O'Neill's personal opposition to radical Protestantism impacted his understanding of civic responsibility, as he hoped to engender a society in which religious identity played a less significant role than one's commitment to order. By April of 1967, O'Neill articulated his clear divergence from the notion of the Ulster ethnostate. In an article for *The Times*, he claimed that James Craig's hope for "a Protestant Parliament for a Protestant people" did not embody the goals of modern Unionism, as the former Premier's hope was "no more representative of the present spirit of Ulster Unionist politics than the declarations of Stanley Baldwin are of conservatism in the sixties."⁹⁹ O'Neill sought nothing less than to remold unionism. He did so

⁹⁸ Bloomfield, *Tragedy of Errors*, 161. *Stormont Papers* vol. 61, 26 October 1965, 2449. "Transcript of Interview with Prime Minister of Northern Ireland on Telefís Éireann," *CAIN*, 11.

⁹⁹ O'Neill, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*, 126.

by challenging the primacy of in-group sectarian clan politics. In this new age, he seemed to imply, religious identity should define Northern Ireland no longer. The Premier's disgust with Protestant cultural supremacism only grew over the years. How then can we reconcile this belief with the Premier's almost laissez-faire attitude towards anti-Catholic discrimination? His paternalism towards the Catholic population—a belief that the government knew best how to manage Catholic grievances—explains his narrow understanding of discrimination. However, O'Neill's community relations policies stemmed from his optimism in contemporary Northern Irish people as much as they did from his privileged upbringing. His approach to parsing out social problems embodied the underlying credo of his domestic policy: self-help.

Drawing from the Victorian Era philosophy of Samuel Smiles, O'Neill governed believing that the responsibility for improved lived experiences rested upon individual actors' behavior. He saw the issues affecting Northern Ireland as fundamentally moral ones. During the first year of his Premiership, O'Neill remarked that the regional population lacked the drive to solve their own problems. He then drew from Smiles's "self-help" philosophy—praising individual entrepreneurship and prudence—to inspire his constituents.¹⁰⁰ O'Neill's public speeches on Smiles and self-help attempted to convince Northern Irish people that socioeconomic progress would best come through individual initiative. The Premier did not oppose government expenditure as a rule, but he did believe that mixed private and state contributions to the province's development would best secure its long-term growth by teaching citizens frugality and responsibility. As O'Neill himself pronounced, finding the right proportion of expenditure from within and without the state was "[o]ne of the most vital issues of the

¹⁰⁰ O'Neill, Draft Notes for Toast of Ulster Association Movement at Government Dinner for Delegates to Conference of Ulster Associations, 20 September 1963, 1, INF/3/3/29. O'Neill, Annual Meeting of the Northern Ireland Council of Social Service, 27 June 1963, INF/3/3/26, 1.

Twentieth Century.”¹⁰¹ His notion of a modern society rested on an overwhelming confidence in private citizens’ ability to improve their country. Individual Northern Irish people’s working to better their homeland would allow the province to help itself win both domestic fortitude and international renown as an economically solvent society.¹⁰² O’Neill’s self-help ideology advertised the latent powers of the Northern Irish community. Beyond spurring physical development, the Premier imagined that his constituents might mend their cultural divide.

Applying his economic philosophy to social affairs, O’Neill tried to sculpt a more tolerant society by encouraging Northern Irish people to share civic pride no matter their upbringing. As early as 1965, he expressed his discontent that many sections in the province hearkened to “local interests” far more than they did to the well-being of Northern Ireland as a whole.¹⁰³ In turn, O’Neill began a steady effort to encourage a communitarian mindset across the region. By translating Smiles’s self-help ideology to community relations, O’Neill imagined that he could encourage the Northern Irish population to forsake their supposed ethnoreligious factionalism. They would achieve both harmony and uninterrupted regional development when united around the cause of bettering their province. The Premier saw the need for Northern Irish people to abscond tribalism. Only then would the province be free to utilize its human and physical resources without hindrance.¹⁰⁴ Because O’Neill also believed that sectarian identities were weakest at the local context, he imagined that voluntary cooperation at this level would best

¹⁰¹ O’Neill, Annual Meeting of the Northern Ireland Council of Social Service, 27 June 1963, INF/3/3/26, 1-2 (quote).

¹⁰² O’Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 32-34. O’Neill, “Speech to the Annual Meeting of the UUC,” 5 April 1963, 1.

¹⁰³ *Stormont Papers* vol. 59, 17 February 1965, 786.

¹⁰⁴ *Stormont Papers* vol. 59, 17 February 1965, 787.

construct stable relationships across the divide.¹⁰⁵ He attempted to establish this political cooperation through small scale, organized acts of patriotism.

The highlight of O'Neill's local self-help scheme was "P.E.P.: the Programme to Enlist the People." In this initiative, the central government invited different townships to host civic pride festivities for an entire week. Since at least 1966, the Northern Irish government had encouraged local civic weeks, also called community weeks, which traveled across various towns in the province. Each town engaging in P.E.P. events advertised Northern Irish goods in storefront windows, and provided government displays lauding recent state investments. Civic weeks were ultimately an attempt to create political pride in Northern Irish people without broaching issues of religion or ethnicity. P.E.P. veiled the longstanding sectarian split by encouraging people to take interest in their locality's well-being. A trickle-up effect of Northern Irish citizens taking interest in improving the whole province would supposedly follow suit. The O'Neill Ministry left the specifics of how each community "celebrated" their civic weeks up to local political bodies. Regardless, the guiding principles of P.E.P., in addition to its decentralized nature, speaks to the underappreciated optimism of O'Neill's policies during this period.¹⁰⁶ To him, P.E.P. was ultimately "a spontaneous expression of civic pride...developing a new sense of involvement in what the Province as a whole is doing."¹⁰⁷ Civic weeks would inspire Northern Irish people to become more engaged citizens of their statelet. This program channeled O'Neill's hope that his constituents would, by their own initiative, learn how to be modern democratic citizens. Civic enthusiasm would be an individual matter. It comes as no surprise, then, that P.E.P.'s execution was modest. As Marc Mulholland has noted, between

¹⁰⁵ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 130.

¹⁰⁶ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 149-150, 154.

¹⁰⁷ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 151.

1966 and 1968, the number of towns hosting civic weeks never exceeded 22.¹⁰⁸ Executed too late to catch wind, P.E.P. was an underwhelming product of O'Neill's aspiring political ideology. The program exemplifies how O'Neill's plan to remold Northern Ireland's identity and outwards perception faltered when the Premier tried to modernize how his constituents thought and acted. The Premier would not realize his dream of a new Ulster through polite words alone.

A Modern Ulster as an International Ulster

O'Neill's vision to heal the province's social fabric built into his larger concern regarding Northern Ireland's place in the world, as he believed that the nature of modern diplomacy and economics made internationalism a fundamental element of Northern Ireland's prosperity. The interconnected nature of global post-war society led O'Neill to fear that, if his province could not compete alongside other Western countries, then it would become an ignominious backwater. Isolationism would be the death knell to Northern Ireland's status as a respected, modern nation. O'Neill declared the same before the Unionist Party conference in April 1966, saying, "we are aware of the world around us. But remember also that the world is aware of us. The luxury of insularity, of believing that we could take account only of the Northern Ireland point of view, is one we can no longer afford. If a great nation like the United States finds that isolationism is an impossible doctrine in the modern world, how much less can it be possible for us?"¹⁰⁹ Northern Ireland's ability to operate in the post-war context was just as important as its international prestige. Recognizing Northern Ireland's low place in the geopolitical hierarchy, at least relative to a Cold War superpower, O'Neill made it even more imperative that his country strive with all its might towards becoming an active player in foreign affairs. The economic benefits of

¹⁰⁸ Mulholland, *Terence O'Neill*, 55.

¹⁰⁹ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 52.

diplomatic ties became central to O'Neillism. Failing to build such connections would close off Northern Ireland from the wealth and renown of the outside world. Time and time again, O'Neill rejected isolationism as anathema to Northern Ireland's material "success."¹¹⁰ Sustained involvement in the global community could very well enhance the province's place in the world.

O'Neill pursued a thorough foreign policy throughout his Premiership. In doing so, he attempted to prove that Northern Ireland could play a significant role in global post-war society. He longed to uplift the province's diplomatic capabilities so that it might contribute towards building a stronger international community. This reasoning was one impetus for O'Neill's furious pursuit of diplomatic visits in 1964. That year, O'Neill went on two separate international tours—one in Northern America, and one in Europe, the latter ostensibly to bolster Northern Ireland's industrial relations with countries such as France and the Netherlands. This effort did not go unnoticed in British media. O'Neill's diplomatic activities even earned him a radio interview with BBC correspondent Charles Wheeler while the Premier was staying in Frankfurt.¹¹¹ Looking out for ever stronger ties with Western nations, O'Neill served a higher purpose than the betterment of his own country. His diplomatic works channeled his inner hope that the world could yet form a single community. Speaking before the Empire Club of Toronto during his North American tour in early 1964, O'Neill insisted that, "[a]s we move—God willing—towards something approaching citizenship of the world, we must contrive to draw upon our strength from the communities which shaped us, however small they be."¹¹²

Recognizing the growing popularity of internationalism in the West, O'Neill styled himself just

¹¹⁰ *Stormont Papers* vol. 58, 27 October 1964, 31. O'Neill, "Annual General Meeting of the Mid-Antrim Unionist Association," 29 November 1963, 1, INF/3/3/31. O'Neill, "Prime Minister's Christmas Message," *The Unionist*, 8 December 1964, PM/5/31/36.

¹¹¹ "List of Television Appearances by Stormont MP's and Senators in 1964," and "Appearance of M.P.'s on Ulster Television – 1st July – 30th September, 1964," D3233/1/5.

¹¹² Terence O'Neill, "Luncheon Meeting of the Empire Club of Toronto, Canada," 19 March 1964, 5, INF/3/3/35.

as much an internationalist as other leaders across Europe and North America. While he tried to improve Northern Ireland's status in the world, he recognized the myriad, even fluid influences on personal identity. O'Neill may have accepted that his province was not yet a significant actor in world affairs, and could not transform geopolitics in a single generation, but it had an outward purpose. That purpose was to bring all its citizens into the global community.

O'Neill used his European visits to foster solidarity with the continent, for he believed that inviting foreign investment would establish Northern Ireland's legitimacy as a culturally Western region. His speeches across the continent or before European-interests organizations emphasized Northern Ireland's growing cultural bonds. O'Neill envisioned a common purpose for all European actors—Northern Ireland included. In a 1967 visit to Bonn, for example, O'Neill made the double case for solidarity among European peoples, and for Northern Ireland's relevance in European politics. The Northern Irish people were "Europeans with a European destiny," and they had every right to participate in continental-scaled post-war politics.¹¹³ O'Neill hoped to convince world leaders that Northern Ireland was part of something larger than itself. In making this case, he turned his argument into reality.

The Premier's approach to Ulster-American relations in particular evidences his internationalist philosophy, for O'Neill used the United States not only as an investor but as a model for Northern Ireland's modernization. From his first visit to the country while Minister of Finance, the Prime Minister developed a strong love of American society.¹¹⁴ O'Neill appreciated how closer diplomacy with America might benefit Northern Ireland. The former country's economic influence made it a keen investment partner. At the same time, its productive

¹¹³ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 190.

¹¹⁴ Westminster House of Lords Hansard, 18 February 1970. (A rocky first visit—he was apparently mugged for a quarter not long after arriving in the United States.)

efficiency attracted the technocratic side of O'Neill's political interests. He publicly recognized the adroit brainpower of American industry, and he used the same as a standard by which to guide Northern Ireland's own economic development. Bringing in American investment became a key element of his foreign policy. While appearing at the Calvin Bullock Forum in 1964, in New York, O'Neill declared with exceeding satisfaction that a number of leading United States corporations had already established themselves in Northern Ireland. From manufacturing giants like Ford to well established chemical producers such as Du Pont, American investment helped industrialize the post-war Northern Irish economy.¹¹⁵ O'Neill tried to build further trust between American investors and the Northern Irish state. As a proven reliable investment partner, Ulster could retain ongoing growth and curry newfound respect from other countries.

Advertising Northern Ireland abroad more than enhanced the province's reputation, for O'Neill used his overseas trips to develop a distinct Ulster national identity. This new Northern Irish nationalism urged native people to take pride in their own special traditions within the framework of being British citizens. Through a second-tier Ulster nationalism, Northern Ireland could become a modern province. In his overseas trips and when receiving dignitaries from outside Northern Ireland, O'Neill emphasized the "special history, traditions and institutions" of Northern Ireland, to gain foreign recognition of a Northern Irish nation, on par with Scotland, England, Wales, or the Commonwealth states. Ulster was at once a distinct cultural-temporal society as well as a subset of the United Kingdom nation-state.¹¹⁶ O'Neill recognized the ethnosectarian divide. By insisting that the province had a coherent sense of self, he attempted to show the world that Northern Ireland was a real nation which deserved outside recognition.

¹¹⁵ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 104-105.

¹¹⁶ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 96-97, 177-178 (quote 178), 185. Bloomfield, *Stormont in Crisis*, 26.

To better define Northern Irish identity, the O'Neill Ministry constructed a nascent regional identity around natural and historical heritage. O'Neill's was a humanistic vision, to improve his constituents' livelihoods by providing them with unifying, orderly symbols. By the Premier's reckoning, the Northern Irish population consisted of warring tribes, yet ones whom he might bring together by integrating strictly Irish- or British-identifying citizens into a non-sectarian Ulster nationalism. Upon opening the Giant's Causeway as a national park, a mere three months after becoming Premier, O'Neill stressed that this landmark was the possession of all Northern Irish people. Facing a divided province, the Prime Minister brought natural and social history into the forefront of public life, to convince the population of Ulster that they shared much in common as a "nation." He called upon Northern Irish people to look beyond identarian politics and appreciate the secular wonders of their province. In his speech, O'Neill also latched upon preexisting government plans to open a pair of Northern Irish-centric museums. They would be, he declared, "two national institutions which are worthy for us."¹¹⁷ O'Neill strove to gather Protestants and Catholics alike under the same cultural banner, and he captured this hope for a tolerant Ulster nation upon opening the Ulster Folk Museum. Speaking alongside a delegation which included Stormont cabinet ministers, the Earl Clanwilliam, and the liberal Rev. Francis B. Sayre, O'Neill's chosen representatives at the museum visit seemed to match his ideal of a catch-all Northern Irish national community under paternalistic Unionist leadership.¹¹⁸ This feeling of Ulster nationhood was not separate from conventional unionism, for British and Northern Irish nationalities were not mutually exclusive in his worldview. By reconciling the two identities, he believed, the people of Northern Ireland would share a stabilizing local identity while retaining the benefits of the Union. Irrespective of O'Neill's plan,

¹¹⁷ O'Neill, "Opening of the Giant's Causeway," 24 June 1963, 1-2, INF/3/3/26.

¹¹⁸ Records of O'Neill's visit to the Ulster Folk Museum, c. 1966, INF/7/A/126-127.

though, his dreamy expressions of regional solidarity could not end a history of communal division overnight. Without concrete policy changes, fear and suspicion would continue to dominate Ulster society.

Ulster “In the Family”: Cultural Ties in a Commercial Union

Despite his international ambitions for Northern Ireland, Terence O’Neill reasserted the political primacy of unionism, since he viewed Great Britain as a guarantor of the province’s existence. To achieve economic solvency, Northern Ireland relied upon its links with the United Kingdom. The Stormont government had wielded limited financial powers since the 1920 Government of Ireland Act, which created Northern Ireland as a political entity—for instance, the provincial parliament was all but unable to change domestic tax rates.¹¹⁹ Ulster’s fate was intertwined with that of Great Britain. Thus, from O’Neill’s point of view, it was in the province’s best interest to preserve those ties. The bond between Northern Ireland and Great Britain helped make Ulster modern by disseminating higher living standards throughout the province. A sound post-war economy, and the association of being “British” like the other three United Kingdom nations, supposedly justified investment in Northern Ireland, according to O’Neill.¹²⁰ At the same time, a constant influx of British capital and the bulwark of the National Health Service safeguarded Ulster society’s material and physical well-being.¹²¹ If Northern Ireland was not a part of the Union—so O’Neill’s line of thought went—then London would have little incentive to support industrialization in the province.¹²² Recognizing Northern

¹¹⁹ Walker, “Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Devolution, 1945-1979,” 122-123.

¹²⁰ O’Neill, “Luncheon for Bankers and Industrialists, St. Louis,” 7 October 1963, 1, INF/3/3/30.

¹²¹ *Irish Times* 25 January 1965, CAB/9/U/5/2. O’Neill, “Government Dinner for the Agricultural Committee of the Council of Europe,” 23 August 1963, 2, INF/3/3/28. O’Neill, “Dinner of the Coleraine Chamber of Commerce,” 18 November 1963, 2, INF/3/3/31. O’Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 56. O’Neill, “Speech by the Prime Minister During a Debate on a Motion of the Preservation of Law and Order in the Northern Ireland House of Commons,” CAB/9/B/205/7.

¹²² O’Neill, speech before the Duncairn Women’s Unionist Association, 30 January 1964, 1, INF/3/3/33.

Ireland's underdevelopment substantiated O'Neill's belief system. The Prime Minister held that only continued faithfulness to the Union would secure future socioeconomic improvement.¹²³ It was up to the people and government of Northern Ireland to prove their loyalty and worth at every step.

O'Neill's desire to advocate for Northern Ireland's place in the union stemmed in part from his fear that it had not asserted its worthiness as a United Kingdom nation, leading him to enthusiastically advertise his country's value to the Union. In a letter to Sir Gerald Templer, a famed British army officer, O'Neill confessed that, "[w]hat I am terribly anxious to preserve is Ulster's good name within the United Kingdom. If it ever came to be felt that we were not worthy of British citizenship the outcome could be tragic."¹²⁴ According to O'Neill's worldview, all Northern Ireland's good fortunes rested upon its sure place in the Union. Building up the region's prestige had ramifications within the United Kingdom, as much as it did without. Political and economic connection to Great Britain allowed Northern Ireland to progress in the post-war world. Any constitutional status that separated Ulster from the United Kingdom would likely hinder this modernization process. Other leading Unionist politicians—namely Brian Faulkner and James Chichester-Clark—expressed similar opinions that Northern Ireland should prove its utilitarian benefit to the Union if it hoped to remain part of that cohort.¹²⁵ Whether genuine worry or a political ploy to further strengthen the Union, these efforts gained currency under O'Neill's tenure as they had not done in decades prior. O'Neill himself foresaw

¹²³ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 57.

¹²⁴ Terence O'Neill to Field-Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, 7 October 1966, PM/5/7/2.

¹²⁵ UUC Yearbook 1967, 14, D1327/20/1/31. *Stormont Papers*, vol. 54, 7 May 1963, 497.

the need for an orchestrated British public relations effort.¹²⁶ The Northern Irish government would now make its case for the Union to its partners across the Irish Sea.

Terence O’Neill argued that Northern Ireland benefited the United Kingdom as much as did England, Scotland, or Wales. The cultural distinction of Northern Ireland aside, his government promised Britons that the little province added to British wealth and society.¹²⁷ This rousing image of solidarity across the Irish Sea gained its greatest tenor when O’Neill addressed organizations in Britain. While illustrating his own plan to modernize Northern Irish society, he also depicted Britain and Ulster as entwined. Every province of the United Kingdom fit together to form a cohesive whole. Each of these parts were inseparable, and they advanced one another’s prosperity. For that reason, Northern Ireland merited treatment as a necessary part of the Union.¹²⁸ Beginning early in his ministry, O’Neill would show this idea through an orchestrated advertising campaign—one which re-imagined modern Northern Irish identity while it familiarized British society with the province.

From its origins as domestic consumer campaign, the O’Neill Ministry’s “Ulster Weeks” program devised to strengthen Northern Ireland’s place in the Union. Previously from May 14th to 19th, 1962, the Ministry of Commerce under Jack Andrews, in league with the Belfast Chamber of Trade, conducted a weeklong civic and commercial pride initiative to stimulate consumer spending on Northern Irish-produced goods.¹²⁹ The campaign encouraged public displays of Northern Irish products in shop windows, not only in Belfast, but in the Design

¹²⁶ O’Neill, “Ceremony to Mark the Inauguration of the Michelin Project,” 21 June 1963, 2, INF/3/3/26.

¹²⁷ *Stormont Papers*, vol. 61, 7 October 1965, 1936.

¹²⁸ O’Neill, speech before the Royal Commonwealth Society, 12 November 1964, 78-82. INF/3/3/32. O’Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 92.

¹²⁹ R. W. Ferguson to F. T. Mais, 5 January 1961; F. T. Mais to R. W. Ferguson, 30 January 1961; COM/62/1/1638. *News Letter* 21 March 1962, COM/62/1/1638.

Center in Lower Regent Street, London, as well.¹³⁰ Capping off the intricate program, the first Ulster Week even created a mascot—Prosperity Pete. A well-groomed man wearing a red sports jacket lined with Pound sterling symbols, he appeared the quintessential expression of a happy, middle-class, and modern Northern Irish person. Such displays evidence that this trailblazing initiative sought to revise Northern Ireland’s image into the post-war era as much as it intended to raise commercial activity. The program tried to change the appearance of Ulster, as much as improve its economy.¹³¹



“Prosperity Pete.” (PRONI collection COM/62/1/1638.)

Although O’Neill’s role in founding Ulster Weeks remains unclear, the Belfast week set an example for the Premier’s diplomacy with Britain throughout the 1960s.¹³² Stormont cabinet secretary C. J. Bateman related that the cabinet proposed a public relations campaign in Britain by late September 1963. The Ulster Agent in London, Francis Evans, later credited O’Neill with the idea.¹³³ Through diplomacy with British mayors and frequent appearances in Ulster Week cities, he embraced the initiative, illustrating his drive to reconceive the core values of Ulster unionism. The Northern Irish government’s message was one of shared citizenship under the

¹³⁰ T. P. Brand to various Retail Associations, c. May 1962, COM/62/1/1638.

¹³¹ T. P. Brand to Miss Knight, 8 May 1962; *News Letter* 17 April 1962; *Belfast Telegraph* 17 April 1962; A.E. Gordon to J. L. O. Andrews, 11 May 1962; *News Letter* 15 May 1962, COM/62/1/1638.

¹³² While archival sources from PRONI’s COM/62/1/1638 collection do not clearly link O’Neill to this Belfast Ulster Week, the language associated with this event bears striking similarity to the Premier’s philosophy. From advertising literature and news articles praising 1962’s Ulster Week as “self-help” for Northern Ireland (see T.P. Brand to various Retail Associations c. May 1962, and *Belfast Telegraph* 17 April 1962 [quote]), to its modernizing image of the province, one wonders whether O’Neill influenced the program, or, if it impacted his own political philosophy.

¹³³ C. J. Bateman to R. F. H. Dunbar, 11 March 1965 [sic] [1964]; C. J. Bateman, note by the Secretary to the cabinet, 12 May 1964, COM/62/1/1402. Cf. Francis Evans speech at Leeds reception, 2 February 1967, CAB/9/F/218/8.

crown and the Irish province's nascent technological-industrial prowess. Simply put, Ulster was as British as Britain proper.¹³⁴ Ulster Weeks imagined a province that shared Britain's consumer society and material culture. O'Neill, among others, demonstrated Northern Ireland's ongoing economic development in order to foment respect for the province. The Ulster Week Committee's concluding report on a trial run in Nottingham, which took place between October 26th to 31st, 1964, recalled that it had begun "[t]o promote a more modern image of Northern Ireland as a skilled industrial and farming community," to encourage British investment in Northern Ireland, and, "[t]o emphasise that Ulster is 'in the family' of the United Kingdom and Commonwealth."¹³⁵ Thus began the first of ten Ulster Weeks which appeared throughout the duration of the O'Neill Ministry—a unique initiative relative to other Northern Irish governments.¹³⁶ In these programs, O'Neill hoped to secure his province's elusive acceptance as a full member of the United Kingdom.

After developments in Nottingham, government officials organized Ulster Weeks into coherent ideological displays with an unwavering structure, in order to project as ideal an image of Northern Ireland as possible. This steady plan began when Stormont bureaucrats negotiated the site of Ulster Week cities by evaluating their market size and preexisting economic relations with Northern Ireland—whether in trade or tourism.¹³⁷ After the finalization of Ulster Week

¹³⁴ C. J. Bateman, note by the Secretary to the cabinet, 12 May 1964, COM/62/1/1402. O'Neill, speech at luncheon for the Lord Mayor of Bristol, 24 February 1965, 1; O'Neill, speech in Bristol Council House, 22 March 1965, CAB/9/F/218/4.

¹³⁵ Report: Ulster Week in Nottingham, 30 November 1964, 1, COM/62/1/1402.

¹³⁶ Those ten cities were Nottingham (October 1964), Bristol (March 1965), Edinburgh (September-October 1965), Sheffield (March 1966), Newcastle-upon-Tyne (September 1966), Leeds (April 1967), Southampton (October 1967), Manchester (March 1968), Leicester (c. October 1968), and Birmingham (April 1969). See COM/62/1/1402, and, CAB/9/F/218/4 through CAB/9/F/218/12B.

¹³⁷ Government of Northern Ireland Information Service to C. J. Bateman, 11 November 1965, CAB/9/F/218/4. Terence O'Neill to W. McIntosh Reid, 8 October 1965, CAB/9/F/218/7. Government of Northern Ireland Press Release (GONIPR), 2 June 1967, CAB/9/F/218/9. GONIPR, 6 April 1966, CAB/9/F/218/7. GONIPR, 17 January 1967; GONIPR, 2 February 1967, CAB/9/F/218/8.

sites, the government of Northern Ireland invited dignitaries to visit the province several months before the marketing campaign proper. Government officials showed British journalists new Northern Irish factories, but O'Neill received Ulster Week city mayors in person. He invited British representatives to luncheons, where the Premier often lauded growing links between both regions. No matter the composition of the party, though, these visits combined image-making and hospitality to send both familiarity and goodwill towards Northern Ireland's eastern neighbors.¹³⁸ As O'Neill told a Leicester civic party ahead of their late 1968 campaign, "[t]his United Kingdom of ours is a small place. We need each other. We need to know each other. This is the purpose of Ulster Week[s]..."¹³⁹ For O'Neill, Ulster Weeks let Northern Ireland develop a more cooperative Union. This program was a first step towards creating a true family of nations which supported one another's economic and political strength. Growing cultural bonds between Britain and Northern Ireland would, over time, produce sound allegiances. The Premier displayed a province on the rise that offered innumerable benefits to its closest allies.

Just as organized as pre-campaign publicity efforts, Ulster Weeks themselves addressed common people, using mass marketing to attract popular awareness of and interest in Northern Irish culture and goods. Government agents began by recruiting Northern Irish firms to sell their goods in British stores during the given week.¹⁴⁰ The selection of these firms, and their Ulster-made goods, projected a modernist message. Though on the one hand Ulster Weeks showed off

¹³⁸ GONIPR, 29 January 1965; Lord Mayor of Bristol's Itinerary, 24 February 1965; GONIPR, 26 February 1965, CAB/9/F/218/4. GONIPR, 2 September 1965, CAB/9/F/218/5. GONIPR, Lord Mayor of Leeds Programme for 21 November Visit to Northern Ireland, CAB/8/F/218/8. GONIPR, O'Neill speech at Stormont Luncheon for the Mayor of Southampton, 16 June 1967, CAB/9/F/218/9. GONIPR, Lunch for Manchester Civic Party, 12 February 1968, CAB/9/F/218/10.

¹³⁹ O'Neill, Speech to Leicester Civic Party, 1968, CAB/9/F/218/11, (emphasis in original).

¹⁴⁰ GONIPR, "Visit of Lord Mayor of Bristol to Northern Ireland," 29 January 1965, CAB/9/F/218/4. Government of Northern Ireland Information Service Feature, 31 August 1966, CAB/9/F/218/7. GONIPR, 17 January 1967, CAB/9/F/218/8.

“traditional” Northern Irish textiles and agrarian produce, displays also included high-tech goods, from home appliances and furniture to electric blankets.¹⁴¹ This nationally identified materialism argued that Northern Ireland was rooted in its deep pastoral-industrial history, just as it embraced the post-war technological-industrial landscape. Ulster goods projected national identity. Window displays were not the only attraction of Ulster Weeks, however. Event organizers also planned out diverse cultural activities to educate local populations about Northern Irish history and culture. Between school lectures, trivia competitions, and even Northern Irish fashion shows, the process of forging stronger political ties began by reaching out to the British masses.¹⁴² From this position, the government of Northern Ireland could then mark out its status as an upstanding member of the Union.

Of course, Ulster Weeks were not the sole product of the Ministry of Commerce, as O’Neill used the programs to advance the outward image of his province. O’Neill frequented British Ulster Weeks in person on almost every opportunity. During these occasions, his public appearances articulated the ideological contours of the program at its clearest. Stressing the blending of human and economic interests during Ulster Weeks, he accentuated the national fraternal spirit that wove Northern Ireland and Great Britain together, even going so far as to assert their literal blood ties, when O’Neill spoke in Edinburgh.¹⁴³ He insisted upon a shared history between the islands, and he urged his audiences to make further history, together, by welcoming Northern Ireland into the British family. Otherwise, he traveled throughout Ulster Week cities, inspecting store displays and meeting people as a paragon of modern Ulster.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴¹ “Manufacturers Participating in ‘Ulster Week in Bristol,’” CAB/9/F/218/4. GONIPR (undated), CAB/9/F/218/5.

¹⁴² GONIPR, 18 March 1965, CAB/9/F/218/4. GONIPR (undated); Ulster Week in Sheffield: Events and Daily Programs (undated), CAB/9/F/218/6. GONIPR, 9 September 1966, CAB/9/F/218/7.

¹⁴³ GONIPR, O’Neill speech at North British Hotel (Edinburgh), 27 September 1967, CAB/9/F/218/5.

¹⁴⁴ Eric Montgomery, “Report on Ulster Week in Sheffield,” 2 May 1966, CAB/9/F/218/6.

Perhaps to demonstrate a more progressive image of the province, the government sent women's sections of the Royal Ulster Constabulary with O'Neill to several British cities. When officers were not serving as security to the Prime Minister, they seemed to have received basic policing duties around city centers.¹⁴⁵ As in everything else with these programs, nearly each detail of O'Neill's visits had a precise execution. The rote composition of Ulster Weeks attests to the Northern Irish government's dedication to reform its image in the 1960s. From being perceived as a distant, forlorn province, leaders such as O'Neill believed the region could become a full and recognizable participant in post-war British society.

Aside from enlarging preexisting relations between Northern Ireland and other members of the Union, the O'Neill Ministry employed national symbolism to advertise a coherent Northern Irish identity. For as much as these events insisted upon the cultural ingenuity of Northern Ireland, they also depicted the region as a monolith. Doing so offered an easily interpretable understanding of Northern Irish society separate from the rest of Ireland. In a January 1964 letter to an advertising group, Ulster Weeks Chief Executive James Montgomery insisted that the publicity programs for the events should focus "on a highly skilled industrial and modern farming community...and not, repeat not, on the stage-Irish, jig, reel and jaunting car image."¹⁴⁶ This emphasis, to distinguish Northern Irish culture, stemmed in no small part from unionist perceptions that the Irish Republic was a backwater. Fearing association with this seemingly pre-modern landscape, Ulster Week organizers set out to make a refreshing picture of Northern Ireland that balanced regional and British identity while rejecting its conventional "Irish" context. City displays advertised the province's goods as distinctly Northern Irish. For

¹⁴⁵ Ulster Week in Sheffield: Events and Daily Programs; Eric Montgomery, "Report on Ulster Week in Sheffield," 2 May 1966, CAB/9/F/218/6. GONIPR, 19 October 1967, CAB/9/F/218/9.

¹⁴⁶ Eric Montgomery to James O'Conner, 14 January 1964, COM/62/1/1402.

example, shops served “*Ulster Bacon*” during Ulster Weeks.¹⁴⁷ More than the products of individual companies, these goods became signposts that a distinct nation existed atop the Irish Isle. Alongside such products, the distinctive Ulster Banner flew about Ulster Week cities in a brazen show of Northern Irish uniqueness.¹⁴⁸ The concept of a concrete Northern Irish identity touched British citizens from Edinburgh to Bristol. Even though the province’s publicity increased in Britain, O’Neill’s stalwart commitment to unionism and creating a modern consumer society could not assuage underlying cultural anxiety in Ulster. Advertising Northern Ireland abroad did nothing to quell its domestic ills.

The Irish Question

Since the Republic of Ireland declared its independence from the United Kingdom in 1916, Republican forces had sought to create a united Irish state. This impasse meant that successive leaders of the government in the South denied the legitimacy of the Northern Irish government, and both Northern Ireland and the Republic rejected normal diplomatic relations with one another as a result. In offering a new vision of post-war Northern Ireland, O’Neill reshaped the principles of Ulster unionism, as he pursued détente with the Republic of Ireland to show that his province belonged in the modern world. He dreamed of proving that Northern Ireland eschewed irrational sectarian division. While heightened diplomacy with the South became a symbol of O’Neill’s larger vision to modernize Northern Ireland, this outcome was not destined. Shortly upon becoming Premier, O’Neill voiced aged Unionist Party talking points against the South. He painted the Irish Taoiseach, Seán Lemass, as an intransigent bully

¹⁴⁷ INF/7/A/5/114 (emphasis my own).

¹⁴⁸ INF/7/A/5/119. Publicity and Display Material for Retailers and Manufacturers,” 1964, COM/62/1/1402. Eric Montgomery, Report on Ulster Week in Sheffield, 2 May 1966, CAB/9/F/218/6.

determined to annihilate the northern Six Counties' constitutional position.¹⁴⁹ Nationalist members of Parliament, such as Thomas Gormley, nevertheless called upon O'Neill to meet with Lemass as early as April 1963.¹⁵⁰ Whether or not such statements influenced the Prime Minister, his public siege mentality seemed to cool a year into office, when he suggested that partition was merely a "political" divide which should not inhibit interactions between the two countries.¹⁵¹ O'Neill's ideology was not fixed. His revolution on this issue reflects how his pursuit of political modernization made him willing to reshape Northern Irish institutions as fundamental as unionism itself.

His heart set on reconciliation, O'Neill first envisioned diplomatic talks with Lemass by late 1964. In his autobiography, O'Neill declared that he chose this path, "in order to try and break Northern Ireland out of the chains of fear which had bound her for forty-three years."¹⁵² Given the acerbic attitude he had shown towards the South less than two years earlier, it is doubtful that O'Neill held this exact motive in the moment of January 1965. Rather, the Prime Minister strove to show that Northern Ireland was a normal geopolitical actor which could cooperate with any foreign state. Quashing the province's sectarian image seemed tantamount more so than ending sectarianism itself. Without informing any members of his cabinet, the Ulster Premier sent his private secretary, J. Y. Malley, to propose the idea to Lemass through Ireland's Finance Minister Ken Whittaker.¹⁵³ By January 11th, 1965, a summit between the two

¹⁴⁹ List of O'Neill quotes beginning on 30 April 1963, CAB/9/U/5/2.

¹⁵⁰ *Stormont Papers*, vol. 54, 30 April 1963, 249.

¹⁵¹ List of O'Neill quotes beginning on 30 April 1963, CAB/9/U/5/2.

¹⁵² O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 68.

¹⁵³ O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 69. Walker, *A History of the Ulster Unionist Party*, 89.

heads of government was already deep in the works.¹⁵⁴ So it was that the O'Neill-Lemass talks began.

After pursuing backroom channels for nearly half a month, Lemass and O'Neill convened in Stormont Castle on January 14th, in a trailblazing act of defiance against the Ulster fortress mindset. That said, their first meeting was more symbolic than it was substantive. In a Stormont memo, we find that the constitutional status of Northern Ireland remained taboo. The meeting was congenial, as both Premiers broached inoffensive topics such as investment, cross-border schools, and trade, amounting to a generally warm ambience.¹⁵⁵ Few concrete diplomatic policies emerged from the meeting. Still, it proved that Northern Ireland—under O'Neill, at least—could set aside its past contentions through peaceful dialogue. As the Cold War raged across the world, the O'Neill Ministry showed its potential as a model for greater reconciliation elsewhere. Speaking before Stormont five days after the conference, the Prime Minister defended his meeting and the integrity of the Union: friendlier relations with the Republic of Ireland would not mean political integration. At the same time, O'Neill insisted “that those sterile forces of hatred and violence which have flourished for so long will at last be crushed by the weight of public opinion,” prompting firm approval from assembled MPs.¹⁵⁶ O'Neill believed that the tolerant consumer society he idealized had come into being. With the support of Parliament and the people, together, Northern Ireland would overcome the burden of intercommunal animosity. In this way, he insisted that the Union would stand firm even while the cultural-diplomatic bifurcation of North and South eased away. So confident was O'Neill that he made an even more brazen choice and met Lemass in Iveagh House, Dublin, on February

¹⁵⁴ Jim Malley, “Planning notes prepared for the proposed meeting between Seán Lemass, then Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister), and Terence O'Neill, then Prime Minister of Northern Ireland,” 11 January 1965, *CAIN*.

¹⁵⁵ [Ken Bloomfield], “Meeting with the Prime Minister of the Irish Republic,” 14 January 1965, CAB/9/U/5/1.

¹⁵⁶ Parliamentary Debates: House of Commons Official Report, vol. 59, 19 January 1965, CAB/9/U/5/1.

9th. While that discussion touched on similar issues as the inaugural summit, the decision to convene in Dublin shifted Northern Ireland's political winds.¹⁵⁷ O'Neill had pushed unionism into modern times.

Even though immediate responses to O'Neill's détente were generally positive, the event planted the seeds for further division in the province, as O'Neill's optimistic modernization scheme failed to acknowledge the depth of sectarian anxiety that plagued Northern Ireland. Not long after his second meeting with Lemass, O'Neill made a third gesture towards breaking the North-South divide by appearing on the Southern network *Telefís Éireann*, alongside moderator John O'Donoghue. In the interview, both men recognized that the summits had provoked trepidation from segments of the unionist community. While the Premier stated that he expected occasional adverse reactions from the meeting, he dismissed such sentiments. Opposition to his rapport with the Irish republic did not daunt him.¹⁵⁸ Over a year after the meetings, O'Neill privately reflected that "some people" resisted the diplomatic gesture. The Premier nevertheless held out hope that the Union would remain strong no matter how amicable North-South relations were.¹⁵⁹ Bringing Northern Ireland into the modern world meant opening its diplomacy to all Western nations. O'Neill spurned the Ulster siege mentality; but, he did not end it. The specter of insular loyalism had awoken once more. In his effort to modernize Northern Ireland's domestic and international image, he brought dynamic feelings into regional politics. The price of this newfound vigor would reverberate throughout the 1960s and beyond.

¹⁵⁷ "Meeting of the Prime Minister with the Prime Minister and Ministers of the Irish Republic," 9 February 1965, CAB/9/U/5/1.

¹⁵⁸ "Transcript of Interview with Prime Minister of Northern Ireland on Telefís Éireann," 1, 10-11, *CAIN*.

¹⁵⁹ Terence O'Neill to Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens, 30 September 1966, PM/5/7/1.

Terence O'Neill's political philosophy was a significant break with standing Unionist Party conventions, and this value system expanded Northern Ireland's political horizons as much as it destroyed political tradition. O'Neill struck a third position between older, retrograde party clientelism and budding civil liberties politics. From his upbringing in England and abroad, he introduced cultural values which differed markedly from those of previous Unionist Party leaders. His desire for a Northern Irish consumer society modeled on contemporary Western states, and post-war Britain most of all, was not unique in the province. However, O'Neill's outsider perspective ensured that he, unlike locally raised politicians, lacked the inhibitions to transform Northern Ireland. This trait inspired O'Neill's bold vision for change. His active, personalized leadership in areas such as foreign policy and community relations-building eschewed decades of a lethargic Protestant ethnostate with little ambition beyond maintaining the status quo. Unionism was changing. It was no longer merely an issue of protecting Northern Ireland from the Irish Republic. Rather, O'Neillism strove to turn the Union into a partnership between Britain and Northern Ireland. Ulster would hold its own within the United Kingdom while showing its potential to the world. Due in no small part to O'Neill's influence, Northern Ireland was just as much a participant in the broader post-war search for national identity as any other European state.

While O'Neill's personal separation from Northern Irish culture and tradition made him willing to remold the province's political landscape, his single-minded hunt for progress saw him fail to consider his philosophy's ramifications for many Northern Irish people. His attempts to reconcile the Northern Irish state and its Catholic constituents were groundbreaking, if incomplete. One cannot fault O'Neill for not undoing centuries of discrimination in a few years. Still, his belief that material progress alone could achieve the same effect over decades proved

him unable to appreciate contemporary institutional discrimination against the Catholic population. Material modernization was the end all and be all of O'Neillism. By striving to create a coherent Ulster national identity, O'Neill hoped to unite his province around shared goals of industrialization and consumer well-being, ending communal division in the process. This approach justified the Premier's diplomatic and industrial drives, but it made little progress towards unifying Northern Irish people at home. The state was growing ever more modern, but wide swaths of its people—outside of a growing middle class—received little inspiration. If anything, the Prime Minister's modernization campaign disturbed significant numbers of Northern Irish Protestants. O'Neill's rapid pursuit of change, and his desire to integrate the province into an increasingly complex world, addled old anxieties among Ulster loyalists. As the Prime Minister chased his most ambitious reforms late in his Premiership, the pent-up angst of the loyalist population turned to fury. Terence O'Neill's vision for a modern Ulster would not go unchallenged.

Chapter III: The Ruin of “New Ulster?”

A Facade of Paradise

The Northern Irish Troubles did not begin at the hands of terrorists alone. While paramilitary organizations from the Loyalist and Nationalist communities take ultimate blame for the province’s nearly thirty years of bloodshed, the seeds of this tragedy also spilled from the fingers of Ulster’s myopic leadership. Blind fervor often characterized the actions of sectarian terrorism during the conflict, and that same folly plagued the halls of Stormont by the late 1960s. Prime Minister Terence O’Neill began his regime with hopeful airs and a determined path towards socioeconomic modernization. By summer 1969, his political journey had gone awry, and brutal militarism darkened the Premier’s shining ambitions. O’Neillism—the combination of his leadership qualities, and social, diplomatic, and economic planning—began to unwind as a result of his uncompromising and overzealous political agenda. To appreciate the preventable nature of O’Neill’s fall, we must shift our study of Northern Ireland’s late 1960s from street demonstrations onto the corridors of provincial power.¹⁶⁰ Doing so shows us that the selfish and narrow-minded rule of Ulster’s political leadership introduced mass violence into their province. As the Prime Minister slowly lost his public strength, however, his value system left an indelible imprint on the Northern Irish landscape. Regional politics were forever changed. The first three years of the O’Neill Ministry were a moderately calm period, characterized by political moderation and heightened economic investment. From 1966 to 1969, by contrast, the Prime Minister’s unwillingness to adapt his policies following complaints from both the Nationalist and loyalist communities contributed to escalating intercommunal clashes across the province. At

¹⁶⁰ For monographs more focused on grassroots politics during this period, see Purdie, *Politics in the Streets*. And Kennedy-Pipe, *The Origins of the Present Troubles in Northern Ireland*.

the same time, O'Neill's inflexible political philosophy legitimized the expression of post-war liberal values in Northern Ireland, reshaping the language of activism and political identity in that space before the dawning of the Troubles.

After three years of relative calm under O'Neill's leadership, Northern Ireland's tenuous social peace collapsed, exposing once dormant sectarian tensions. On May 7th, 1966, a group of Protestants set out to bomb a Catholic-affiliated pub in West Belfast. While attempting to do so, the aggressors inadvertently damaged the home of a 77-year-old Protestant widow named Matilda Gould. She succumbed to her injuries 46 days later.¹⁶¹ Between the miscalculated bombing and Gould's death, perpetrators also murdered two Catholic men in the area. John Patrick Scullion and Peter Ward were shot on May 27th and June 26th, respectively—Scullion was 28 and Ward only 18. Throughout the summer, the men responsible went by different titles, but the most lasting of these was the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF).¹⁶² This banner was an homage to the Partition-era paramilitary group of the same name, which championed Protestant fury against Home Rule. In 1966, as in the 1910s, thoughts of a new war encroached upon Northern Ireland. The UVF itself advanced this narrative to *Belfast Telegraph* reporter Barry White, who received two phone calls, ostensibly from UVF members, on June 4th and 16th. In both instances, the callers claimed responsibility for Scullion's death, and they defended his murder as part of a crusade to annihilate the Irish Republican Army.¹⁶³ The shadow of conflicts past had cast its dark sway over the province once more.

The killings embellished sectarian fears throughout Northern Ireland, injuring Terence O'Neill's vision for communal unity just as the Premier tried to turn his harmonious policy

¹⁶¹ Feeny et al., *Lost Lives*, 28.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*, 25, 26-29.

¹⁶³ Police District Inspector's Report, "Stabbing of John Patrick Scullion," 23 June 1966, CAB/9/B/300/4A.

proposals into reality. Late June witnessed a public frenzy over ongoing violence. Editorials in the *News Letter* speculated about revived Protestant militarism, while Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer admonished then-Home Affairs Secretary Brian McConnell to ward against “religious wars.”¹⁶⁴ From the newsrooms of Belfast to the halls of Stormont, a terrible anxiety gripped the public. Political leaders accentuated the tension formed by recent terrorist plots. Aside from poisoning public discourse, the UVF murders of 1966 deterred O’Neill’s push for industrial growth and diplomatic modernization on a very concrete level. Peter Ward’s slaying induced the Prime Minister to fly home from Paris, cutting short a planned visit with French industrial leaders and a trip to the site of the Battle of the Somme.¹⁶⁵ The gravity of the political situation hinted at the fragility of O’Neillism.

Recuperating from this setback as best he could, on June 28th, O’Neill spoke before a closed meeting of Unionist Party leaders, as well a public assembly of the Stormont House of Commons.¹⁶⁶ During the latter appearance the Premier denounced the UVF with poised rancor. In proscribing the organization, he articulated that all Northern Irish people had a shared responsibility to challenge extremism:

“We stand at the cross-roads. One way is the road of progress which has been opening up before us with all its promise of a richer and fuller life for our people. The other way is a return to the pointless violence and civil strife of earlier years. We must not let anyone push us down that road. For myself, I do not seek the political company of anyone who would condone or justify recent events in the slightest degree. I will not stand idly by and see the Ulster which we love dragged through the mud...The battle against these evil forces must be waged throughout the community; but it must begin here, in this House, today.”¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁴ *News Letter*, 24 June 1966, 29 June 1966 [quote], CAB/9/B/300/4A.

¹⁶⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 27 June 1966, CAB/9/B/300/4A.

¹⁶⁶ Minutes Book of the Ulster Unionist Council, 28 June 1966, D1327/22/3.

¹⁶⁷ Northern Ireland House of Commons, Hansard Debates, 28 June 1966, 778-779, CAB/9/B/300/4A.

This moment of crisis offered O'Neill the chance to underscore the need for social order. Progress and order were, to the Premier, one in the same. If there was to be a "New Ulster," Northern Irish people would first have to subdue the subversive element within their company. O'Neill insisted that his leadership offered the population wealth and stability that an exclusionary philosophy would never provide. By returning to the same ethnosectarian divide of old, the Premier argued, the whole province would sink into a violent quagmire. Both Northern Ireland's well-being and its reputation were at stake. Despite all the boundless optimism which O'Neill had radiated in years prior, he knew that his political program was not indefatigable, and by openly recognizing this fact he tried to further justify his vision. Underlying this dramatic portrait was a sincere belief that Northern Ireland faced a choice between embracing the future or succumbing to the past. Before the province could assert itself as a truly "modern" place, it would supposedly have to overcome the hurdles of irrational bigotry and ignorance. Still, as the Prime Minister's policies would show, a call for Northern Irish people to alter their behavior did not necessitate change within the government proper. Anti-discriminatory legislation did not appear. This hypocritical leadership—which used progressive language, yet failed to deliver on its promise of a tolerant society—would polarize the electorate, initiating O'Neill's slow, arduous decline.

Hypocrisy and Conspiracy: The Fracturing of O'Neillism

The mid-1960s challenged O'Neill in the corridors of power just as much, if not more so, than in the political grassroots, as more and more Unionists began to argue that the Prime Minister's policy agenda would not holistically improve the lives of Northern Irish people. Even before the rise of the UVF, Northern Ireland had begun to split apart in a way that alienated the Prime Minister from Protestants and Catholics alike. As O'Neill's agenda heralded greater

economic investment and rationalization, government policy compounded an ongoing divide between the province's developed, urban East and its impoverished and largely agrarian West. In Stormont, the Nationalist and Northern Irish Labour parties noted how state economic policy had an almost vampiric effect on counties Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone. As early as 1965, MPs decried government negligence towards the West. There, opposition parliamentarians said, the government had divested railroads, factories, and practically all major modern sources of employment and growth.¹⁶⁸ Since industrialization had taken hold of Northern Ireland, the three Western provinces had gradually lost their wealth to the East. NILP MP David Bleakley warned that government growth incentives had caused "a great drift" in human and physical capital "from the West to the East," as the government failed to incentivize corporate movement to the West, to make up for jobs lost in the past decades.¹⁶⁹ From O'Neill's ambition to create new cities in Northern Ireland, to his dream of an industrial consumer society, the Premier did not gather the entire province in his modernization drive. This failure to deliver on his message of an inclusive Ulster society created even more distrust for O'Neill's development program. Within the Unionist organization there developed a split between those who supported O'Neill and his reforms, and those who opposed both him and his political agenda. Discontent with O'Neill's policies justified the growing belief that his liberal value system rang hollow, and that the Prime Minister himself was incompetent—a liability to the party itself.

When opposition members pressed O'Neill on these concerns, however, he deflected criticism towards his policies, illustrating his total unwillingness to alter government policy. He

¹⁶⁸ *Stormont Papers*, 11 May 1965, 1455-7, 1468-70, 1480.

¹⁶⁹ *Stormont Papers*, 11 May 1965, 1457.

stated without hesitation that the government did not plan investment on a local basis. Rather, it sought “to develop the whole of Ulster,” with a focus on comprehensive regional growth.¹⁷⁰ O’Neill’s weak investment in the Western provinces stemmed from his belief that growth anywhere in the province would benefit the people of Northern Ireland everywhere. The Premier outright declared that his Ministry “recognise[d] no distinction between one area of the Province and another,” supposedly quelling sectarian politics by pursuing a development plan that would benefit the whole province.¹⁷¹ Over time, the Prime Minister seemed to assume, industrial and consumer development would spread across the region without any need for state direction. O’Neill discarded the demographic realities of his province as he tried to establish a moderate and universalizing unionism. This negligence, towards the real, human impact of his policies—or lack thereof—brought ever more pressure upon the government. No stiff-necked willfulness on O’Neill’s part could hide the dearth of public confidence which began to hound Stormont.

Though the Prime Minister dodged criticisms levied against his Ministry, the larger Unionist Party apparatus could not ignore its waning strength in preeminently Western areas. Specifically, the 1966 Ulster Unionist Council yearbook—a year in review document for the Unionist Party in 1965—illustrated the organization’s growing troubles. A column by John McRobert, chair of the UUC Executive Committee, urged party members to address declining membership in the province as a whole, but “especially in the remoter rural areas,” where Unionist support seemed to have fallen at the sharpest rates. Tacitly, McRobert hinted at the notion that government leadership had brought this issue upon themselves: insufficient communication with the electorate about ongoing policy successes had created a lethargic party

¹⁷⁰ *Stormont Papers*, 11 May 1965, 1472.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*

base.¹⁷² Though he refused to blame any specific individuals, the fact that McRobert situated his lament in official Unionist literature shows the growing strength of anti-government criticism during O'Neill's time, even before late 1966. Factionalism brewed in unionist politics. McRobert's gentler complaints anticipated far more incited criticisms towards O'Neill's leadership from the summer of 1966 onwards. These criticisms gradually escalated until they developed into a cacophony of political discord, and unapologetic hostility towards the Prime Minister.

Already experiencing a discomfited parliamentary party after pursuing détente with the Irish Republic, O'Neill faced escalating opposition from Unionist MPs following the 1966 Easter Rising commemorations. Reflecting on his 1965 meetings with Taoiseach Seán Lemass, O'Neill acknowledged the strain which that diplomatic initiative had wrought between himself and the Protestant population.¹⁷³ If bilateral relations with the South had not created enough public pressure for O'Neill to defend British interests, however, the anniversary of the Easter Rising would. Commemorating the 50th anniversary of the Nationalist insurrection, that year's celebrations carried especially solemn weight. Not only had the press publicized information that cabinet ministers had received security details before potential IRA action during the commemorations, but the celebrations themselves also lasted around three weeks—far longer than on previous occasions.¹⁷⁴ Amidst this apprehensive setting, O'Neill deployed extra police forces throughout the province.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, he allowed most of the demonstrations to continue on the grounds that they were historic elements of many Nationalist communities' local

¹⁷² UUC Yearbook 1966, 15, D1327/20/1/30.

¹⁷³ O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 73.

¹⁷⁴ O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 79. O'Neill, "The Choice is Ours," 2 August 1966, D2669/13.

¹⁷⁵ Government of Northern Ireland Press Release, 7 April 1966, CAB/9/308/1.

identities.¹⁷⁶ Thus came another offense to many Ulster Protestants. Even though the UUC Chairman at the time supported O'Neill's response to the commemorations, lasting damage had occurred.¹⁷⁷ The formation of a backbench Unionist liaison committee in early September exemplified the tense relationship which now existed between O'Neill and many Unionist leaders.¹⁷⁸ It was only later that month when those tensions finally burst.

The autumn of 1966 witnessed an emerging civil war in the Unionist Party as backbench MPs tried to expel Terence O'Neill from office. That a plot brooded against O'Neill was ostensibly common knowledge to some party circles. In early September, Portadown Alderman Charles Cooper warned the Premier of a forthcoming coup against his leadership.¹⁷⁹ Then, on the night of Friday the 23rd, eleven Unionist MPs made public their petition of disapproval against the Prime Minister.¹⁸⁰ The announcement took Northern Ireland by storm. Both the *Belfast Telegraph* and the *News Letter* dedicated massive columns to the petition over the weekend. Day by day, the names and goals of the conspirators came to light. Spearheading the revolt were MPs representing either rural or predominately working-class constituencies, such as John Taylor and Desmond Boal.¹⁸¹ Though each of the signatories brought their own specific complaints against the government, they all remonstrated against O'Neill's leadership. The Premier's handling of the Easter Rising celebrations was depicted as tepid, his investment into the West all but absent, and his executive style too effete to unify disgruntled Protestants. Even cabinet ministers who publicly defended O'Neill admitted that he had often acted without taking his colleagues' opinions into consideration—individually choosing to meet with Taoiseach Seán

¹⁷⁶ O'Neill, "The Choice is Ours," 2 August 1966, D2669/13.

¹⁷⁷ Comment by Senator John Drennan (UUC Chairman), 3 August 1966, D2669/13.

¹⁷⁸ *Belfast Telegraph*, 11 September 1966, D2669/13.

¹⁷⁹ Charles Cooper to Terence O'Neill, 13 September 1966, PM/5/7/1.

¹⁸⁰ *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 September 1966, D2669/13.

¹⁸¹ *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 September 1966; *News Letter*, 26 September 1966, D2669/13.

Lemass being the most infamous example of this behavior.¹⁸² The directedness and independent flair with which O'Neill once inspired Northern Irish politics had now brought the Unionist Party into disarray. But the Premier would not abandon his personality overnight. With characteristic determination, O'Neill declared his intention to meet with the rebels at a session of the UUC executive committee on September 27th.

Although O'Neill convened over 40 Unionist MPs, Senators, and peers in a private session at Stormont to unify his party, the meeting merely aggravated its division, exposing the competing factions that had formed in Ulster unionism due to the Prime Minister's policies.¹⁸³ After the Premier briefly addressed ways he might work with backbenchers, the conspirators clarified their position. Desmond Boal, the first opponent to speak, railed against O'Neill's decision-making process, particularly regarding constitutional issues. Boal highlighted the meeting with Lemass as having put not only the country but the party itself at risk. "[A] serious disease" enervated the latter. Various members of the party's constitutionally conservative wing echoed this view, holding that open diplomacy with the Irish Republic as well as divestment from the West were proceeding at much too fast a pace, and with much too little democratic consent. The former Premier, Lord Brookeborough, proposed that O'Neill receive probation, an idea which Boal seconded. To some at the meeting, O'Neill's condescension against political radicalism had merely incited more loyalists to flock towards the Reverend Ian Paisley's retrograde banner. Numerous party stalwarts nevertheless defended the current Prime Minister. The Lord Mayor of Belfast insisted that most Northern Irish people were behind O'Neill, while other speakers endorsed his "liberalism," and how he had navigated the province through a

¹⁸² *News Letter*, 24, 26 September 1966; *Belfast Telegraph* 24, 26 September 1966, D2669/13.

¹⁸³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 27 and 28 September 1966, D2669/13.

“rapidly changing world.” However, even some of those who supported O’Neill staying on as leader confessed having reservations with his allegedly overzealous pursuit of reform, matched with his tendency to keep backbenchers ignorant of the government decision-making process until after the cabinet announced new policies. Without naming specific issues, Senator James Cunningham and Robert Bradford, MP, displayed hesitance with the rapidity of the Prime Minister’s policy initiatives. Granted, the fact that North-South relations dominated the meeting perhaps left clarification unnecessary. Other figures declared their allegiance to the Premier with a proviso that the government should consult backbenchers before taking any sweeping actions. Although a wide swath of elected officials stood behind O’Neill’s ideological bulwark, his position was by no means secure. O’Neill’s liberal-minded policies had not won universal acceptance even among its supporters, and this hesitation to fully back the Premier indicated that further reforms would sow profound tension in the unionist community.

Amid these contested proceedings, the prospect of London sweeping in to maintain political order overshadowed all. Anxiety was palpable throughout the room. For Lord Robert Grosvenor, recent events had nearly brought him to suicide. Fear of direct rule from Westminster, he suggested, now compelled him to support O’Neill. A terror had swept over senior Unionists. Perhaps feeling that the riotous days of the Irish Civil War were not too far behind, the pursuit of law and order induced the party—for this fleeting moment—towards solidarity. As the meeting closed, O’Neill succinctly confirmed the need for more intraparty liaison, but he did not suggest that he had erred in his policy approach. A motion of confidence in the Premier was suggested, and 27 of the 29 MPs present voted their support for the Prime Minister, with the result officially made unanimous after Finance Minister Herbert Kirk made an

appeal for party unity.¹⁸⁴ No conciliatory gestures could hide the wound that had struck Unionist politics, however. O'Neillism's tremendous impact on official Unionist ideology had come at a great cost, since the party was now split into warring factions. Battle lines were drawn, and one was either for or against Terence O'Neill. The solidification of these factions hinted that a future provocation would split the party in twain.

If any good came from the 1966 conspiracy, it was the reinvigoration of the Premier's base, for O'Neill's near defeat encouraged public leaders and the general populace to advocate for his politics. A triumphant media rally for the Prime Minister guaranteed his establishment support. From the circulation of the conspirators' petition and into early October, major British and Northern Irish newspapers published editorials urging the people of Ulster to stand beside their leader, lest the region fall into disarray, or face London's financial censure. Journalists outlined how O'Neill's leadership would benefit Northern Ireland in the long term.¹⁸⁵ The press depicted his Ministry as anathema to sectarianism, and hundreds of letters from the general public spoke to the appeal of O'Neill's modernist vision. In the face of seething opposition to his political reforms, his parlance had gained wider currency. Some correspondents wrote in with assurances that his program was "enlightened," his leadership "courageous," and his triumph before the UUC "a victory for tolerance, good-will and democratic government."¹⁸⁶ As both a liberal and a unionist, O'Neill retained the confidence of many constituents. From concise messages of support, to passionate philippics against his enemies, the public's reaction to

¹⁸⁴ Minutes Book of the Ulster Unionist Council, 27 September 1966, D1327/22/3. On the first vote, Edmond Warnock abstained, and John Taylor, MP, voted against. Desmond Boal and Robert Nixon—two of O'Neill's staunchest opponents—left the meeting before the vote of confidence took place. By late 1966, not even the appeal of party unity could bring some Unionists to even pretend to tolerate O'Neillism.

¹⁸⁵ *Belfast Telegraph*, 24 September 1966; *News Letter*, 24 September 1966; *Sunday Times*, 2 October 1966, D2669/13.

¹⁸⁶ Adam Cooper to Terence O'Neill, 26 September 1966; Sir Edward Beddington-Behrens to Terence O'Neill, 28 September 1966; William Annett to Terence O'Neill, 28 September 1966, PM/5/7/1. Cf. PM/5/7/1-2 collections.

his leadership in this moment reprieved the embattled Premier. His dream of a new Ulster still lived. O'Neill himself had newfound confidence in the province's direction, and as supportive correspondence flooded his office, he embraced his "Liberal" moniker.¹⁸⁷ The only lingering omen of loyalist restlessness came from those who did *not* write to O'Neill. While many local Unionist Party associations relayed their official backing to the leader, these messages were mainly from chapters in Eastern counties such as Antrim and Down.¹⁸⁸ The Prime Minister had convinced many Unionists that the modernization of Northern Irish society merited bold decisions and rapid changes. However, the silence from Western Unionist associations was telling. The Premier had evidently made little ground in showing rural and working-class loyalists that industrial and political change would not disrupt their livelihoods. So, Northern Ireland's great cultural and geographic divide persisted. O'Neill's vindication had not captivated all of Ulster. The battle of 1966 was yet unresolved, and the ramifications of O'Neill's uncompromising bent would haunt the province in the immediate years to come.

Breakdown: from Derry to Dissolution

Despite triumphing over his rivals, a feeling of gloom still lingered in O'Neill's mind, as he observed depressing political shifts occurring throughout the country by December 1966.¹⁸⁹ This dread proved true, if delayed. In Unionist politics, between the fall of 1967 and early 1968, O'Neill's decision-making process once again aroused controversy. While in November 1967, O'Neill sacked Agriculture Minister Harry West over an expenses scandal, the Premier also refused to endorse Unionist candidate John Brooke—son of the retiring Lord Brookeborough—during a March 1968 Stormont by-election. Both Brooke and his local Fermanagh Unionist

¹⁸⁷ *Belfast Telegraph*, 28 September 1966, D2669/13.

¹⁸⁸ See PM/5/7/2.

¹⁸⁹ See O'Neill to K. P. Bloomfield, 28 December 1966, in Bloomfield, *Stormont in Crisis*, 97.

Association refused to support O'Neill's leadership, which the Premier took as a personal attack.¹⁹⁰ His harsh response to this matter brought his independent decision-making streak into question once more. Some Unionists, West included, considered his sudden punishments of well-respected party members borderline insulting.¹⁹¹ One by one, opponents of O'Neillism—both old and newly-minted—began to speak out. Though the Premier's allies had seemingly staunched a growing party rift in 1966, O'Neill's refusal to consult with colleagues opened up the split once again. This time there would be no reconciliation. The Prime Minister's inability to stabilize Unionist politics was part of an ongoing trends towards cultural division across the country. For, as O'Neill isolated his party opponents from the seat of power, his unwillingness to commune with a sorely aggrieved Catholic population bore violence that impaired his political authority.

The death knell for Unionist unity arrived in the vein of community relations, for after a long effort to sweep Catholic grievances to the wayside, the emerging Civil Rights movement dashed the Unionist Party's longstanding dominance in the public sphere. The Irish Catholic minority in Northern Ireland had elevated its voice since the foundation of the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA) in February 1967. Unlike earlier civil liberties organizations that had formed in the province, NICRA was heavily organized, drawing from political and trade union activism and activists to support legal reforms.¹⁹² A pressure group, it elevated public awareness over anti-Catholic discrimination in areas such as housing and local franchise, besides the general oppression of Roman Catholics throughout Northern Ireland. NICRA's presence

¹⁹⁰ Terence O'Neill to W. A. P. Wilkinson, 26 October 1967; UUC Standing Committee Minutes, 15 March 1968, D2669/16. Terence O'Neill to John Brooke, 20 March 1968; John Brooke to Terence O'Neill, 21 March 1968, D3004/C/5/4.

¹⁹¹ UUC Standing Committee Minutes, 15 March 1968, D2669/16.

¹⁹² "The Cameron Report," *CAIN*, 185-6.

skyrocketed in August 1968, when RUC officials truncated a Civil Rights march from Coalisland to Dungannon, ostensibly to prevent clashes with loyalist counter-protestors.¹⁹³ In reality, however, RUC intelligence believed that the march would organize IRA members and Irish Republican dissidents.¹⁹⁴ The march's ban left Civil Rights activists undeterred, if embittered. Soon after the events at Dungannon, NICRA leaders planned an even greater march in the Catholic-majority city of Derry, set for October 5th. Few knew how significant that demonstration would become.

There was no excuse for the march on Derry to end any way but peacefully. NICRA organizer John McAnerny corresponded with RUC officials more than a month ahead of the protest, even updating police on the planned march route so as to help officers direct traffic.¹⁹⁵ Despite this cooperation, on October 3rd, the Minister of Home Affairs Bill Craig banned the march on the grounds that it could give rise to discord in the city.¹⁹⁶ No form of legal intimidation would inhibit the Civil Rights movement at this stage, though, and the march went on. Nationalist politicians Paddy Devlin and Gerry Fitt led a crowd of several hundred Catholic and Protestant protestors through the streets of Derry.¹⁹⁷ Not long after, the march stopped before an RUC line. Officers began beating the demonstrators without warning.¹⁹⁸ As a police-induced riot broke out, Terence O'Neill's guarantees that institutional discrimination was in decline surely rang hollow. An RUC memorandum later claimed that all violence directed against protestors was defensive, yet three Westminster Labour MPs who served as observers at

¹⁹³ *Belfast Telegraph*, 26 August 1968, CAB/9B/205/7.

¹⁹⁴ A. Kennedy (RUC Inspector General) to Ministry of Home Affairs, 24 August 1968, *CAIN*.

¹⁹⁵ John McAnerny to R. McGimpsey, 8, 28, and 30 September 1968, *CAIN*, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/bibdbs/authorbib.htm>.

¹⁹⁶ William Craig, "Public Order Act (Northern Ireland) 1951," 3 October 1968, *CAIN*.

¹⁹⁷ R. Kerr, A. Kerr, and J. Ryan, "Three Eye-Witnesses Report on Londonderry," 8 October 1968, 2, *CAIN*.

¹⁹⁸ "The Cameron Report," *CAIN*, 171. R. Kerr, A. Kerr, and J. Ryan, "Three Eye-Witnesses Report on Londonderry," 3.

the march related otherwise. They described police officers breaking through the assembly in militaristic formation. As water cannons blasted apart crowds and windows, the baton-wielding RUC hounded demonstrators like quarry.¹⁹⁹ Nothing better challenged O'Neill's homogenizing vision for Northern Ireland than televised images of a monolithically Protestant police force brutalizing unarmed protestors.²⁰⁰ The Premier had once sworn to alter the fabric of provincial life, but it was now clear that political change had evaporated when it was needed most.

Beyond its clear detriment to public confidence in the government, police violence during the Derry march also exemplified the limits of O'Neill's impact on political culture. Though he had galvanized the state around consumerism for the past five years, the Premier produced a feeble cross-communal dialogue. Loyalist Stormont MPs railed against protestors in subsequent parliamentary debates after the march. William Craig alleged that the IRA had plotted to wreak carnage in Derry, while cabinet ministers and others implicated the marchers as revolutionary Communists.²⁰¹ Cold War paranoia touched Northern Ireland as much as the rest of the Western world. In Ulster, as without, this paranoia became a useful way to justify bigotry. The Prime Minister's silence during these proceedings was telling. A quest for order, and not reconciliation, had dominated his Premiership up to this point. His silence did not mean he was subject to inertia, however, and as Northern Ireland tore at the seams, O'Neillism changed too.

It soon became obvious that NICRA's public pressure campaign had worked, for between October and November 1968 the O'Neill Ministry pursued more socially conscious public relations efforts. On October 25th the government announced a province-wide housing

¹⁹⁹ W. Meharg, "Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association Parade and Meeting in Londonderry," 7 October 1968, *CAIN*. R. Kerr, A. Kerr, and J. Ryan, 4-7. Cf. "The Cameron Report," *CAIN*, 51.

²⁰⁰ "The Cameron Report," *CAIN*, 229.

²⁰¹ *Stormont Papers*, 16 October 1968, 1016-17, 1020, 1022, 1028, 1068.

conference for the end of the month. A state press release invited local government officials to convene at Stormont, where they would commune with O'Neill and others about proposed changes to local housing distribution systems.²⁰² It is worth noting that the unelected Catholic activists who had induced the conference did not receive invitations.²⁰³ The Premier would, as always, pursue change in his own way. As he admitted in a letter to the Downpatrick Town Clerk shortly after the conference, "I am so anxious that this social issue should be taken out of politics so that we can concentrate on the real need which undoubtedly exists [in the province]."²⁰⁴ The Prime Minister's lofty vision for a modern and industrialized Northern Irish consumer society treated all other problems as secondary. Housing reform distracted from his larger political goals. It was fruitless, in O'Neill's mind, to try to legislate out communal differences when economic growth would do the same in the long term. Still, on November 30th, his government passed a five-point reform program that curtailed unlimited policing powers, announced a vague needs-based housing allocation system, and ended the corporate vote in local elections.²⁰⁵ These reforms were not the brainchild of O'Neill himself, but rather those of moderate Unionist cabinet ministers.²⁰⁶ Sporadic outbreaks of RUC and protestor violence continued despite the proposals. Seeing what little the reforms did to change the public's behavior, the Premier espoused law and order once again.

Facing a sundered community, on December 8th O'Neill gave a televised appeal for communal harmony, positioning his political beliefs as the stabilizing force that Northern Ireland

²⁰² GONIPR, 25 October 1968, CAB/9/N/4/21.

²⁰³ Patrick A. Duffy to Terence O'Neill, 28 October 1968; H. Black to Patrick A. Duffy, 29 October 1968; People's Democracy Petition, Housing Conference, 30 October 1968, CAB/9/N/4/21.

²⁰⁴ O'Neill to Maurice N. Hayes, 1 November 1968, CAB/9/N/4/21.

²⁰⁵ CAIN Timeline, "Friday 22 November 1968," <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/events/pdmarch/chron.htm>. Bell, *The Irish Troubles*, 75.

²⁰⁶ Cabinet Meeting Minutes, Stormont Castle, 20 November 1968, CAB/9/B/205/7. Bloomfield, *A Tragedy of Errors*, 170.

needed. Not unlike his response to the UVF murders, the Prime Minister depicted his province at the proverbial crossroads once more. His overarching message was that moderate unionism offered well-being to all. Distancing himself from both Irish Republicans and “so-called loyalists who talk of independence from Britain,” O’Neill railed against cultural factionalism.²⁰⁷ Neither a strictly Irish identity nor the commitment to an unwelcoming Protestant ethnostate would ensure peace over the long term, he argued. Rather than urge the people of Northern Ireland to reconcile their religious and ethnic differences, O’Neill demonstrated their common cultural ties. Roman Catholic Civil Rights activists could—and, in the Premier’s view, should—identify as “Ulstermen” as much as Protestants.²⁰⁸ This universalizing Ulster identity would allow his constituents to look beyond what divided them. Despite the tribalistic veneer that had covered Northern Irish politics up to this point, Terence O’Neill’s dream of a harmonious, modern community still shone in the public eye. The Premier’s vague yet unifying watchwords of “modernity” and “progress” carried weight, even as provincial society appeared ready to destabilize at a moment’s notice. Tactfully, O’Neill emphasized the economic importance of British subsidies that the Union provided, without repeating the patriotic unionist battle cries typical of many loyalist politicians.²⁰⁹ There was room for compromise between both communities. O’Neill’s address suggested a different and more progressive unionism than the one which TV audiences had seen a month ago in Derry. Not once, however, did he admit his own culpability in allowing police forces to run rampant throughout the city.

Predictably, O’Neill’s soothing words produced a moment of calm during Northern Ireland’s turbulent winter, but they did little to quell grievances that had built up across the

²⁰⁷ O’Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 143.

²⁰⁸ O’Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 144.

²⁰⁹ O’Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 142-143.

province in preceding years, inducing O'Neill to reapply his new Ulster philosophy. Immediate reactions to the speech were ebullient. Over 100,000 people wrote to newspapers in support of the Premier's comments, and a positive social atmosphere around Christmastime saw O'Neill and Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer read Bible verses together on television.²¹⁰ Crucially, several prominent Civil Rights groups declared a cessation of marches until January 18th, supporting O'Neill's call for an intercommunal truce.²¹¹ Even this peace did not last. A determined group of young Civil Rights activists organized a march from Belfast to Derry, beginning on New Year's Day. Not long after, loyalists ambushed the group, solidifying a familiar cycle of Protestant antagonism against Catholic demonstrators. As public sentiments shifted more towards the Civil Rights movement, so too did O'Neill's political strategy. Instead of battling with the extreme right of his party, he recommended reforms to other cabinet officials on the grounds that such measures would draw "moderate support" away from Catholic activism, and diffuse the movement.²¹² Still, he showed enough appreciation for protestors' complaints that he further recommended a government inquiry into the causes of ongoing protests. This initiative was an "attempt to restore confidence" in his Ministry—a pursuit of harmony for stability's sake, and not for justice.²¹³ Even while O'Neillism now became more liberal in practice, social justice had not suddenly become the watchword of his administration. The Premier's political style had adapted to meet new circumstances. His core value system remained constant. In turn, a culture war continued to split Northern Ireland, setting the stage for its total civic realignment.

²¹⁰ O'Neill, "Why I Resigned," *Sunday Telegraph*, 25 May 1969, D1327/9/28. O'Neill, *Autobiography*, 109.

²¹¹ Most prominent of which was the Derry Citizens Action Committee, see Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*, 172.

²¹² O'Neill, "The Political Situation," cabinet memorandum, 14 January 1969, 1, CAB/9/B/205/8.

²¹³ O'Neill, 14 January 1969, 4-5, CAB/9/B/205/8.

Crossroads: O'Neillism and the Election of 1969

Although O'Neill imagined that a government inquiry would unite the province, this initiative tore apart the Unionist Party even further, bringing the province further towards chaotic levels of political disunity. Days after the announcement, Commerce Secretary Brian Faulkner resigned from the government front bench in protest. He stated that he opposed the commission because it would likely blame local franchise discrimination on recent disturbances, effectively forcing Stormont to enact new voting reforms, and stealing parliamentary sovereignty in the process.²¹⁴ As the *News Letter* insisted that Faulkner's "shock resignation" had undermined O'Neill's leadership, the public mood after Faulkner's departure was one of doubt and disarray.²¹⁵ Not long after, Health and Social Services Minister William Morgan resigned on grounds similar to Faulkner's, compounding O'Neill's circumstances.²¹⁶ His enemies swooped in. On January 30th, twelve Unionist MPs—including former cabinet ministers William Craig and Harry West—signed and distributed a letter demanding that the Premier leave office. The departure of senior cabinet ministers signaled that O'Neill's beliefs had irrevocably splintered the unionist community. With key figures in the Unionist Party unrestrained by and unwilling to follow their central leadership, rogue behavior and political extremism were bound to follow. The political situation now untenable, O'Neill announced an election to be held on February 24th.²¹⁷ It was a last-ditch effort to determine who ruled Ulster unionism once and for all.

In his bid to regain ideological control over the Unionist Party, O'Neill turned the election into a referendum on his own value system and leadership. In effect, he asked voters to

²¹⁴ *News Letter*, 23 January 1969. "Faulkner Resigns from Northern Ireland Government," *RTE*.

²¹⁵ *News Letter*, 23 January 1969.

²¹⁶ *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 62.

²¹⁷ *CAIN* Timeline 1969, <https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/othelem/chron/ch69.htm>.

determine the fate of liberalism in post-war Northern Ireland. The Premier's campaign made his personality centerfold to their publicity—election badges urged voters to “Go-Ahead with O’Neill,” while posters juxtaposed O’Neill’s name with the Red Hand of Ulster.²¹⁸ The electorate would decide whether O’Neill was a true symbol of post-war unionism. Unfluctuating from his previous six years in office, the Prime Minister exclaimed that his leadership offered the province nothing short of blissful material modernization. Another O’Neill Ministry, his campaign argued, would bring industrial growth, investment in education, and the upward progress of “the new Ulster” which he had championed during his time in office.²¹⁹ It was an optimistic and glowing dream of consumer mirth which evoked many other contemporary Western democracies. Economic and social conformity with Great Britain seemed to hover over O’Neill’s thoughts every time he spoke on the road to the election. Still, the decision to put the Prime Minister’s face at the center of election iconography—often literally—evoked the same character flaws which had dogged O’Neill throughout his Premiership. By hyper-personalizing his campaign, O’Neill seemed to attract his middle-class base, using his high name recognition in his favor. Nevertheless, the move was fodder for any and all who opposed O’Neill and his agenda. Ultimately, O’Neill’s campaign strategy was a gambit which he could not avoid. The high stakes nature of an election campaign gave his ideology cogency unlike never before.

Though the Prime Minister gravitated much of the media and Unionist Party establishment towards him in years prior, the for-him-or-against-him nature of the election campaign led even onetime opponents to accept O’Neillism, while adding tenor to his greatest supporters’ voices. Perhaps the most significant of these public supporters was Lord

²¹⁸ “Go-Ahead with O’Neill” campaign badge, 1969, D2966/39/2. “Northern Ireland General Election 1969,” YouTube.

²¹⁹ “Northern Ireland Doesn’t Exist,” *RTE. Ulster at the Crossroads*, 66.

Brookeborough. Though for the past three years he had, on several occasions, suggested that O'Neill resign, Brookeborough now stood behind his successor. In an interview with *RTE* before the election, the former Prime Minister insinuated that supporting Unionists who opposed O'Neill in the election would dismantle party unity. On top of that idea, Brookeborough admitted that universal adult suffrage in local elections was a necessary measure. The aged stalwart of older Unionist politics was by no means a converted O'Neillite—he continued to have stern reservations against the diplomatic summits with Seán Lemass and Jack Lynch. Still, Brookeborough's tacit endorsement of the current government on as divisive an issue as franchise demonstrates that O'Neill's appeals had at last caught wind among moderate unionists, as social breakdown worsened into early 1969.²²⁰ O'Neillism had not merely divided the province. More so, it realigned Northern Ireland's political landscape, expanding what was acceptable in unionism.

At the same time, liberal unionism now underwent an organizational renaissance, as O'Neill's liberal, middle-class supporters at last developed an independent political outlet in the New Ulster Movement (NUM). Founded in early 1969 by a small group of private citizens, the movement gave voice to O'Neill's grassroots base while the Unionist Party gave way to division. The NUM emerged as a way to counter escalating gridlock and social tension since late 1968.²²¹ It did not abide by strict party politics, however. Fearing, as one founding member termed it, "a right wing take over of the O'Neill government," the group provided organizational and financial aid for any candidate it deemed moderate, and open to progressive social change—liberal Unionists included.²²² The NUM harnessed a nonsectarian political style at a moment when the

²²⁰ "Lord Brookeborough Gives Views (1969)," *RTE*.

²²¹ Cameron Commission proceedings, "Mr. Brian W. Walker Examined, 4 July 1969, 10, GOV/2/1/83.

²²² "Mr. Brian W. Walker Examined," 12, GOV/2/1/83.

sectarian structure and history of the Unionist Party tied Terence O'Neill's hands on swift community relations reform. Thus, to some extent, the emergence of the NUM represents the logical evolution of O'Neillism. As the Premier's ideology seeped into Northern Ireland's intellectual fabric, its supporters applied it towards even more radical ends than O'Neill ever intended. The movement's leaders challenged both Protestant domination of government services and a perceived Communist element in the Civil Rights movement.²²³ There was the consciousness of Northern Ireland's growing post-war middle class, animated by the words of the current Premier. Even so, this post-sectarian message did not reach its most needed audience. The New Ulster Movement all but failed to gather supporters from proletarian neighborhoods.²²⁴ Like O'Neill, his own most earnest supporters proved unable to speak to the real cultural and economic anxieties of working-class Protestants and Catholics. The aura of a moral high ground that permeated Northern Ireland's liberal vanguard, and their unwillingness to understand the concerns of the larger public, inhibited their ability to realize institutional change.

When election season entered full force, however, O'Neill truncated his public reach by maintaining a thoroughly local campaign presence. A competitive race in his Bannside constituency against the Reverend Ian Paisley dominated O'Neill's time. Seemingly confident that his reputation could win out across the rest of the province, the Premier locked himself into an almost hermetic isolation within Bannside. As the Unionist establishment made O'Neill central to the official party campaign, however, the Premier refused to use his personal appeal to other candidates' advantage. His only televised election address was held on February 21st, just three days before voting.²²⁵ By and large, he substituted public speeches and interviews with

²²³ Memorandum from the NUM to the Commission of Inquiry, in Ronald Boyle to J. W. Russell, 30 April 1969, GOV/2/1/83.

²²⁴ "Mr. Brian W. Walker Examined," 11.

²²⁵ *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 66.

canvassing, yet even this campaign strategy did not stop O'Neill from burning bridges. While being interviewed on television during a canvassing session, the Premier accused former cabinet minister Henry Morgan of betrayal for resigning from the government, even though the Premier had consulted him on the community relations commission before its announcement.²²⁶ In this and similar statements, O'Neill exemplified his weakness for vendettas. The election campaign had become a battle of egos, besides an ideological contest. This belligerency would haunt the Premier in the weeks and months after the last votes had been counted.

As O'Neill more or less solidified his appeal to the Northern Irish electorate, his opponents within the unionist community hardened their positions in response, creating a predictably inconclusive election result. The label of "official" unionism was contested, as Pro- and Anti-O'Neill Unionist Party candidates, and independent, Pro-O'Neill unionists all stood for election. The campaign also raised the profile of hardline loyalism as Ian Paisley and his surrogates denounced O'Neill's agenda. At loud and patriotic campaign rallies, they declared that O'Neill had betrayed Protestants with concessions to the Civil Rights movement.²²⁷ Long suppressed concerns with the Premier's government expressed themselves across Northern Ireland on election night. One by one, O'Neill's opponents from within the party were returned by their constituencies. After coming victorious at his election count, William Craig announced that "no alternative" existed for the Unionist Party other than replacing O'Neill.²²⁸ The Prime Minister's attempt to steer his party's ideological direction had blundered. His aggressive attempts to push through reform without working alongside party members sowed widespread scorn for O'Neillism and the Premier himself. Altogether, out of the 36 official Unionists

²²⁶ "Canvassing in Cullybackey (1969)," *RTE*.

²²⁷ "Northern Ireland General Election (1969)," <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4wg3eEYLKcs>. "Crawling to the Catholic Church," *RTE*.

²²⁸ "William Craig Returned in Larne," *RTE*.

elected to the 52-member body, 23 were Pro-O'Neill and 13 Anti-O'Neill.²²⁹ The Unionist Party's civil war brought Northern Ireland's old political hegemony to its knees.

A disturbingly close result in Bannside humiliated the Premier's already weakened position, proving that he alone could not monopolize Unionist modernization. Paisley's campaign rhetoric was at times strikingly similar to that of his nemesis. On one occasion the populist reverend claimed that his platform was one of "progressive Protestantism, civil and religious liberty, [and] justice for all."²³⁰ The Reverend's campaign proved that social progress was a fickle thing in early post-war Northern Ireland. Paisley welcomed gradual socioeconomic opportunities to benefit Northern Ireland, but in contrast to O'Neill, he argued that the Ulster ethnostate would not have to change for the province to become modern. The final poll showed that many agreed with this hesitant view of modernity: in Bannside, O'Neill took home a thin lead of 1,414 votes out of 16,386 cast.²³¹ To make matters worse for the Prime Minister, the BBC's *24 Hours* program broadcast election night coverage to the whole nation. Viewers throughout the United Kingdom could have seen that O'Neill was absent at his own count. Paisley took aim at his rival on the program, stressing how the Premier's zealous quest for modernization at any cost had made him appear an out of touch elitist to many working-class loyalists. Speaking to English reporters, Paisley said, "Captain O'Neill, the Great Anointed One, the man superior to everyone else, the man who can't even come to his own nomination, or come to the count, he is a minority candidate at the moment in Bannside."²³² BBC hosts observed this

²²⁹ Boothroyd, "Northern Ireland Parliamentary Election Results."

²³⁰ "Ian Paisley Outlines his Election Policy (1969)," *RTE*.

²³¹ Bell, *The Protestants of Ulster*, 121. Stormont General Election (NI) 1969, *CAIN*, <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/issues/politics/election/rs1969.htm>.

²³² "BBC Northern Ireland Election Coverage 1969," YouTube.

all with grim repose. The media forces that once bolstered O'Neill's position could now do little more than bear witness to his decline.

Where unionism splintered, the election energized wide swaths of the Nationalist community, allowing Civil Rights activists to present an alternative idea of civic identity that pressured O'Neill's image as the face of a modern Ulster. It was a watershed turn against the Irish community's old guard. In his Foyle constituency, Nationalist Party leader Eddie McAteer lost to the independent John Hume, a Civil Rights activist and former schoolteacher.²³³ Asked about the changes in Catholic politics, the Nationalists' chief whip at Stormont, Roddy O'Conner, admitted that his party's overt focus on ending partition had grown stale in the contemporary political climate.²³⁴ Dissolving the Anglo-Irish Border still appealed to many Irish Catholics, but this issue did not speak to the moment's most poignant needs. Rights were the priority over reunification. In line with the political winds, by contrast, the Civil Rights leaders who ran in 1969 championed a nonsectarian Northern Ireland. Young activists such as Bernadette Devlin, Austin Currie, and Ivan Cooper eschewed the law and order rhetoric typical to mainstream unionism. This new generation of leaders insisted that tolerance and respect—not conformity for harmony's sake—would best lead Northern Ireland in the post-war era.²³⁵ While few in this group won seats at the 1969 election, they legitimized civil liberties politics in the democratic arena. Their candidacies proved that support existed for a society grounded in social justice. New voices challenged O'Neill's modernist image of the country, and by no means would they be silenced.

²³³ "Leader of Nationalist Party Loses Seat (1969)," *RTE*.

²³⁴ "Nationalist Party View (1969)," *RTE*.

²³⁵ "Bernadette Devlin Polls Well (1969)," "Currie Calls for Nationalists to Unite (1969)," "Election Eve (1969)," and "Ivan Cooper Elected in Mid-Derry (1969)," *RTE*.

The End of O'Neillism, the End of New Ulster

As hope drove the Nationalist community onwards, institutional opposition to O'Neill's regime showed itself with bare fury. The ire that seeped out of Stormont now surged up from the Unionist grassroots. In January, a Unionist organizer from Belfast had privately recorded a scathing rebuke of the O'Neill regime. Speaking from three decades' experience in the party apparatus, he declaimed that the Prime Minister had usurped the power of local Unionist associations, choosing a narrow ideal of "reform" which marginalized the opinions of the party base. In short, the unpublished diatribe accused O'Neill of turning the Unionist Party into a one-man show.²³⁶ Events following the 1969 election hinted that this sentiment was far from uncommon. The Unionist Party's annual meeting on March 31st gathered party representatives from across Northern Ireland. A barometer for the general unionist mood towards O'Neill, the conference only exacerbated his miserable circumstances. The Prime Minister won a vote of confidence at the meeting by only 338 votes to 263.²³⁷ With 56% support from the broad spectrum of his party more than a month after the de facto February plebiscite on his leadership, this "confidence" was ephemeral. Terence O'Neill had done all but nothing, since his tenuous victory at the ballot box, to foster reconciliation between his agenda and the now obvious qualms of many Unionists. Whether out of stubborn persistence or inexplicable ignorance, the Premier did not even attempt to assuage party members that he would consult local Unionist chapters on basic issues as his predecessors had done. The post-election stalemate gave way to lethargy. With the governing Unionist Party split in twain, political disillusionment followed.

²³⁶ Norman Laird, "The Record of O'Neill," January 1969, 3, D2669/13.

²³⁷ "The Party for Genuine Progress: Ulster Unionist Council Annual Report for 1969," 8, D2669/16.

By April 1969, the community relations situation had languished to such a terrible extent that the solvency of the political establishment began to fade away. O'Neill's hesitancy to assert his forward-looking political beliefs for most of the month allowed more forceful voices to dominate public life. In one such vein, the Civil Rights movement roared once again with the election of Bernadette Devlin to the Westminster Parliament. A by-election to the Mid-Ulster constituency, held on April 17th, saw Devlin vanquish the Unionist candidate Anna Forest.²³⁸ As Civil Rights supporters publicly triumphed in Derry the next day, however, loyalists met them with ire. RUC forces charged into the city under the pretense of ending rioting, yet like in October 1968, indiscriminate police aggression against Catholic demonstrators filled the city atmosphere with venom. Devlin herself bore witness to these protests.²³⁹ Speaking to the media shortly after her election, she warned that unless the clashes ended soon, then events in Derry would mark "the beginning of the civil war."²⁴⁰ Proverbial storm clouds swept further across Northern Ireland as UVF terrorists bombed water installations surrounding Belfast on April 20th.²⁴¹ The specter of sectarian bloodshed crept over Ulster's horizon yet again.

Even at this point, the situation was not hopeless. Devlin championed an ethic of unity during her maiden speech at Westminster, two days after the bombings. Giving a caustic rebuke of the current political status quo, she held that Protestants and Catholics alike had become second-class citizens. They were all of them victims to an elite motivated by clientelism and unrestrained, growth-obsessed capitalism.²⁴² At its core, Devlin's speech testified to widespread sentiment that Northern Ireland's political leaders did not listen to their constituents—sentiment

²³⁸ Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*, 193-4.

²³⁹ Bernadette Devlin, *The Price of My Soul*, London + Pan Books Ltd. 1969, CAIN.

²⁴⁰ "Devlin Predicts Civil War (1969)," *RTE*.

²⁴¹ CAIN 1969 Timeline.

²⁴² Westminster House of Commons Hansard, 22 April 1969, 281-287. Without stating it explicitly, hers was a clear critique of O'Neillism's economic desserts.

shared, in its own way, by the loyalist working class. From urban Belfast to rural Tyrone, the province cried out for assurance that peace would endure. Northern Ireland needed a stabilizing leader who could marry the similar interests of both communities. But, after years of positioning himself as this very figure, party turmoil had overwhelmed Terence O'Neill's private world.

The day following Devlin's reproach of the Unionist government, the O'Neill Ministry began to collapse, forcing the Premier into a frenzied last attempt to smash Northern Ireland's political agony. Addressing Stormont, O'Neill told MPs that he would push for universal adult suffrage at local elections, eliminating the previous town council voting monopoly of homeowners and their spouses.²⁴³ Cabinet minister James Chichester-Clark resigned later that day in response to the declaration. While Chichester-Clark insisted that his was a protest against the "timing" of the new policy—supposedly it would aggravate ongoing community belligerence—it seems far more likely that he had capitulated to concerns over how Protestant loyalists would react.²⁴⁴ Although 56% of the Unionist parliamentary party voted for O'Neill's suggestion, his doom was imminent.²⁴⁵ The Prime Minister inarguably held a bare majority's support among both the party grassroots and its senior leadership. Confronting him now was his rapid loss of support within the cabinet. O'Neill feared that his tenure was ending, as he suspected that more members of the parliamentary party would turn against him. Two further loyalist terrorist attacks on Belfast's infrastructure, and the arrival of British "peacekeeping"

²⁴³ The Campaign for Social Justice in Northern Ireland, *Northern Ireland: The Plain Truth* (Castlefields, Dungannon: 15 June 1969), 2nd ed., 13, D3257/2.

²⁴⁴ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 198-199.

²⁴⁵ Mulholland, *Northern Ireland at the Crossroads*, 195. Cf. this result with the March 31st vote of confidence—it seems that support for O'Neill's leadership and policies, as well as opposition to the same, were wholly polarized by spring 1969.

troops shortly afterwards, broke the Premier's lingering resolve.²⁴⁶ On April 28th, in a final effort to keep his ideology alive, Terence O'Neill resigned as leader of the Unionist Party.²⁴⁷

The Prime Minister's resignation speech was televised the following day. It at once speaks to the hope that lingered in Northern Ireland on the eve of the Troubles, and, the self-imposed contradictions that inhibited O'Neill's political ambitions. Throughout his speech, he assured viewers that his understanding of a fair and charitable Northern Irish society still endured. O'Neill encouraged his supporters with poise and calm certainty. Though his time had come to leave office, he guaranteed that the cause for which they had stood was righteous.²⁴⁸ However, even these kind words pointed towards his ideological shortcomings. Where those who "loyally supported" him had modeled rectitude for the past six years, he blamed undesirable intransigents for stonewalling a modern and liberal province. In the Premier's dichotomous view of the world, one was either with him or against him. His tremendous ambitions suffered at the hands of his own fervor. Later in his speech, for instance, he proudly declared that, "I have no regrets for six years in which I have tried to break the chains of ancient hatreds."²⁴⁹ All throughout his tenure, O'Neill presumed that he followed a heroic quest towards changing aged customs. This fallacy brought down his Premiership more than any other thing. Relegating the problems of his day to the distant past, O'Neill discounted the contemporary grievances of Catholics and Protestants. Their fears and desires were not, in his view, born from their present historical moment, but the byproducts centuries-old cultural tribalism. Such a simplistic idea of Northern Irish society condescended against all the people of Ulster. O'Neill's words exposed

²⁴⁶ Bloomfield, *A Tragedy of Errors*, 175-6. James Callaghan, "Mr. James Callaghan, Secretary of State for the Home Department, in the House of Commons," 2, 21 April 1969, *CAIN*.

²⁴⁷ "O'Neill Tells of Resignation Plan," *Sunday Times*, 25 October 1969, D2669/13.

²⁴⁸ O'Neill, *Ulster at the Crossroads*, 199.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 200.

his own tacit fatalism, for by this point he imagined that the problems of his time were not solvable. The boundless optimism of 1963 had given way to despair. With this last lament, Terence O'Neill slipped permanently from the political realm in which he had always been an outsider.

Modernity and progress were never uncontested ideas in Northern Ireland. This was especially so in the late 1960s, as competing visions for the region's post-war future filled the public sphere. Terence O'Neill's leadership escalated this debate, and his rapid pursuit of progress through communal reconciliation brought the nebulous nature of modernization into the forefront of Northern Irish life. Individuals who cherished the protection of cultural traditions could and did envision themselves as modern. Hence why Ian Paisley eagerly appropriated the vogue parlance of progress, while turning it towards his own ends; or, why large segments of the Unionist Party supported O'Neill's economic policies despite finding his Irish *détente* anathema. A hope for systematic political change swept across Northern Ireland during the 1960s. Few, however, agreed on the necessary extent to which society and institutions would have to alter themselves, before Ulster was made an "authentic" modern place. This friction gave momentum to figures like O'Neill, who claimed to offer a middle way that would harmonize most, if not all, of society's needs. Unlike his predecessors in office, the English-born Prime Minister saw latent commonality between Northern Ireland's two communities. He believed that a free consumer society could yet merge those two communities into one—all ethnic tensions would fade away once society united through peaceful, materialistic values. This newfound political gospel redefined what was possible in a province some thought lost to sectarian hostilities.

The Premier's determined search for a harmonious society was rarely aware of its real impact on Northern Irish people. An overwhelming focus on securing communal harmony and

economic growth ensured that the O'Neill Ministry lost sight of the fairest means to reach these goals. Three of the province's six counties and the entire working-class became secondary to the hurried style of O'Neillism. Though the Prime Minister's confident voice brought together the province during the summer crisis of 1966, the government eroded this solidarity by changing policy without preemptively striking consensus. Certainly, O'Neill's unchecked willpower delivered at times. His leadership brought the one-party Ulster state far away from its sluggish and obstinate roots: he showed that unionism could be a forward-looking ideology, which sought to create as much as defend. O'Neill forced Northern Ireland's dominant political tradition into the family of post-war Toryism and Cold War liberalism. Nevertheless, the means by which he secured this transformation truncated its longevity. Believing that the moral rectitude of his ideas was a given, O'Neill betrayed his own ideals. From the halls of Stormont, to the Unionist Party cloakrooms, and the campaign trail, his overconfidence ostracized him to his enemies as much as it endeared him to his allies. He envisioned himself as uplifting a province trapped in its own bitter past. That outlook led him astray from resolving the concerns that distressed his constituents. Inevitably, O'Neill's stubbornness and pride bore fruit. The violence that swept across Northern Ireland for the next three decades was not the result of timeworn animosities. It was the failure of leaders who put ideology before all else.

Conclusion: The Fate of the Nation

Our growing distance from the events of the 1960s has obscured the era's intricate inheritance. Beneath the broad ideas of revolt and upheaval that might characterize popular understandings of the decade, there rests a more layered reality. Seeing the world through a black and white moral lens may offer a comfortingly simple image of the past, but it inhibits us from understanding how we inherited the present world. Such has been the case with Terence O'Neill's time in office. Even though he presented a glimmering view of a post-sectarian Northern Ireland, he was no champion of human rights. And, while his idyllic "new Ulster" crumbled by early 1969, the seeds of change he planted were far from barren. O'Neill's impact on Northern Irish life rests somewhere between definitive success or failure—we must see his leadership for all its accomplishments and deficits. The harmonious consumer society that O'Neill imagined in office failed to materialize, yet his vision injected regional politics with hope, and the idea that Northern Ireland could be as modern as any other country. This hope would bear fruit: decades later, the tenuous accord of the 1998 Good Friday Agreement welcomed Northern Ireland into the new millennium, and into the realm of secular democratic society. It realized the possibilities which Terence O'Neill had once championed. Furthermore, the transformation of the New Ulster Movement into the liberal-minded Alliance Party, from 1970 onwards, demonstrated that O'Neill's secular and internationalist political ideology appealed to many across the Northern Irish social landscape. In contrast to his optimistic public veneer, the Premier's chronic self-doubt would have surely made the developments of the late 1990s and after unexpected even to him. Peace seemed as distant and impossible in Northern Ireland by 1997 as much as did civil war in 1963. Neither process was fated. Both depended upon human determination and error in the moment. We must not selectively define Terence

O'Neill by his error, however, knowing that his audacious value system legitimized the very existence of European liberalism in Northern Ireland. The Ulster Premier failed to unify his country, but he integrated it into the modern world. This contradiction defines O'Neill's perplexing legacy.

The paradoxes inherent to O'Neillism, in addition to the reaction against his beliefs, remind us of the fragility that characterizes the post-war democratic system. Vague, soaring watchwords such as "progress," "modernity," and "the nation" can become tools of oppression as easily as they can serve liberal politics; for liberal democratic culture has never held a monopoly on these concepts. With every "moderate" democratic leader who touts a modernistic vision of national renewal, there will always lie in wait a demagogue or street politician willing to subvert the political vogue towards their own ends. Only by readily defining what modernity and progress are, and ceaselessly explaining the implications of these terms to the broader public, can we begin to impede the forces of reactionary subversion. Terence O'Neill styled himself as a modern leader with modern ideals, but so too did Ian Paisley. Surveying twentieth century European History, one can hardly fail to discern a government that *did not* present itself as paving the way for moral and social progress. Among these states, O'Neill's example most clearly illustrates the risks of seeking economic modernization at any price. Urban development, self-help, Ulster Weeks, and détente with the Irish Republic were all foundational to the New Ulster he tried to build. However, O'Neill's reckless and inequitable industrialization campaign undermined all these accomplishments. In cases like Northern Ireland during the 1960s, when a discriminatory government transitioned into something approaching a free democracy, it was the zeal of political leadership which sowed social unrest. Terence O'Neill pursued his ideology with crusaderesque dogmatism. He refused to note any error in his agenda's foundations, or to

commune with those who doubted or misunderstood his beliefs—the latter were simply below him. At the same time, intransigent loyalist officials and activists condemned change in and of itself as an existential threat to the Ulster Protestant people. This controversy surrounding political modernization repeated itself throughout the twentieth century, and it was especially pronounced in Northern Ireland. O'Neill's campaign to uplift every segment of Northern Irish society attempted to do so in one way only. Thus, it swept the real grievances of downtrodden Catholics and forgotten working-class Protestants to the wayside. Unless liberal democracy's champions temper their ideals and prepare to compromise with the diverse needs of society, democratic states will remain perpetually insecure.

Even as it teetered towards the proverbial cliff's edge, however, Northern Ireland left its footprint imbedded in the post-war search for national identity. Terence O'Neill helped define modernity and progress like any leading titan of Western politics. His actions at home and abroad nurtured the global understanding of modernity. Indeed, to appreciate the extent to which this political debate captivated all of Europe, we must put O'Neill's deeds into conversation with his contemporaries. The Northern Irish Premier's force on domestic life matched that of Willy Brandt, Lyndon B. Johnson, Harold Wilson, and Charles de Gaulle in their own communities. 1960s Northern Ireland was not beholden to the past. From city to countryside, its people gazed longingly upon the future. Unionist, Irish Republican, and Ulster-identifying groups all proposed hybrid interpretations of modernization. These distinct visions imitated outside understandings of the "ideal" modern world, and they reinterpreted those ideas in the context of Northern Irish cultural mores. Events in the province during this period exemplify that the post-war modernist vogue was a global movement, without definite traits or boundaries. It was a unique moment of hope and disarray.

Modernity was and remains a fluid idea, and the indecision and contention that rent apart Northern Irish society during the 1960s demonstrates how malleable and inspiring modernity can be. Even throughout the tragic events of 1968, 1969, and beyond, the province brimmed with opportunity. Terence O'Neill's buoyant message of national renewal gave reason for thousands upon thousands to anticipate a better future. More so, his high position in Northern Irish politics justified private citizens' efforts to take to the streets, and to rally their ambitions for the province. In less than a decade, O'Neill broke down Northern Ireland's rigid political traditions, and he cast the province into the storming currents of international affairs. His model demonstrated the endless possibilities inherent to the people of Northern Ireland and human beings everywhere. We have ever been the masters of our own horizons. While O'Neill did not carry out his dream of a new Ulster, he gave reason for his countrymen to see promise in a better tomorrow. The qualities of that new and ever more promising Northern Ireland may differ depending on the dreamer, but the hope of each vision is universal. Even the Troubles could not kill that hope. And if the worst civil strife cannot deter us from seeking to better our world, then nothing shall. It is a desire that lends us courage amidst chaos, and which emboldens us to make the best of our shifting and inscrutable modern times.

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