Politics in the Streets

The origins of the
civil rights movement
in Northern Ireland

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THE O'NEILL YEARS 1962–1968

You coasted along.
And all the time, though you never noticed,
the old lies festered;
the ignorant became more thoroughly infected;
there were gains, of course;
you never saw any go barefoot.

The government permanent, sustained
by the regular plebiscites of loyalty . . .
Faces changed on the posters, names too, often,
but the same families, the same class of people.
A Minister once called you by your first name.
You coasted along
and the sores suppurated and spread.

Now the fever is high and raging;
who would have guessed it, coasting along?
The ignorant-sick thresh about in delirium
and tear at the scabs with dirty finger-nails.
The cloud of infection hangs over the city,
a quick change of wind and it
might spill over the leafy suburbs.
You coasted too long.

from 'The coasters' by John Hewitt

The period from 1962 to 1968 saw the last year of Lord Brookeborough's premiership of Northern Ireland and his succession by Captain Terence O'Neill. Under the new leadership it was widely believed that decisive changes were taking place and that Northern Ireland was being 'modernised'. By this term, technocratic politicians, media commentators and middle-class intellectuals meant that, in their opinion, Northern Ireland was ceasing to be obsessed by sectarian symbols and was beginning to share the

pre-occupations of the rest of the Western world with economic growth and consumer satisfaction. Challenges to this outlook, especially those which were motivated by sectarian suspicions and old political antagonisms, were seen as a final atavistic spasm. This was an illusion which helped to weaken the O'Neill government, to disarm moderate opposition to it, and to prevent fundamental problems from being addressed. In 1964 and 1966 serious outbreaks of communal violence in Belfast warned that less had changed than surface appearances might indicate. But almost nobody was looking below the surface.

The Ulster Unionist Party went into the May 1962 Stormont general election still seeming supremely confident that it could keep its traditional base of support together. At the press conference to announce the date of the election, Brookeborough was asked if the party would make history by not presenting the border as an issue. In answer, Minister of Home Affairs Brian Faulkner pointed to a poster bearing the slogan 'this we will maintain'. When asked whether Catholics were free to join the Unionist Party, Brookeborough would give no definite answer, saying that it was a matter for local Unionist associations. In fact the election campaign proved to be much less concerned with sectarian issues than with economic ones and it resulted in a major increase in the vote for the Northern Ireland Labour Party (NILP), from a total of 37,000 in 1958 to 77,000. In Belfast, Labour emerged from the election as a major threat to the position of the Unionist Party; although it did not win more than its existing four out of sixteen seats, its overall vote and its majorities were substantially increased.

These unpleasant facts for unionism were put aside in September 1962 to celebrate the fiftieth anniversary of the Ulster Covenant of 1912, the major landmark in the history of Ulster Unionist resistance to Home Rule for Ireland. The celebrations, however, were carried out in seeming unconsciousness of the fact that the 'Ulster people' would not be unanimous in welcoming them. Prime Minister Lord Brookeborough's message for Covenant Day stressed the unchanging nature of the Unionist heritage and its determination to remain part of the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth, and the commemoration blurred the lines between the Government, the parliament, the Unionist Party and the Orange Order. The event was organised by the Belfast County Grand

Orange Lodge, with helpers seconded from the Unionist Party. Among the speakers were Brookeborough, Sir Norman Stronge, the Speaker of the Northern Ireland House of Commons, and the lord mayor of Belfast. There was a protest by the British Labour Member of Parliament (MP) Marcus Lipton in the Westminster House of Commons at the presence of the banner of LOL 1688, 'Friends of Ulster', which showed the portcullis symbol of the House and bore the legend 'House of Commons Westminster'. [1]

Exactly a month after the red-white-and-blue bunting had been taken down, Brookeborough was at the dispatch box facing the unhappy task of presenting to parliament the Hall Report on the Northern Ireland economy. A series of lay-offs in shipbuilding and linen had emphasised the serious decline in Northern Ireland's traditional industries. Unemployment had gone up from 6.7 per cent in 1960 to 7.5 per cent in 1962, sparking off trade-union demonstrations and protests. The Government had promised that the Hall Report would provide a strategy for overcoming these problems, but the prime minister had to tell the House that the central plank of the Government's strategy had failed to win unanimous support from the Hall Committee and had been vetoed by the Westminster government. This was for a subsidy of 10 shillings (50 pence) per week for all employees in productive industry. The Westminster government's reponse, contained in a letter from Home Secretary Henry Brooke, was that such a subsidy would 'have the opposite effect to that intended by impeding the flow of labour from contracting industries to those which are growing'.

Vivian Simpson, NILP MP for Oldpark in Belfast, tore into the Government; the situation, he claimed, was 'a major economic problem, if not a crisis, for which the Hall Committee has failed to find adequate remedies' and for which the Stormont government had 'failed to find remedies which the Westminster Government could accept'. The proposed subsidy 'would have covered less than half the insured worker population' and was 'ill-conceived', since 'public funds would be paid out to efficient and inefficient alike'. The NILP'S answer was the immediate creation of a Regional Economic Planning Unit, under the National Economic Development Council of the United Kingdom: 'The British Government have come to believe in national planning and we have the right to

demand . . . similar measures suited to our own Province.' The major stumbling block to such a strategy, however, was the Government's attitude to the trade unions. Official recognition was withheld from the Northern Ireland Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions (ICTU), because the congress had its headquarters in Dublin. The Government did recognise individual trade unions and the Confederation of Shipbuilding and Engineering Unions, which was separate from the ICTU; but the organisation that represented the overwhelming majority of Northern Ireland trade-unionists was excluded. Simpson put the issue squarely:

> Until the Government of Northern Ireland recognise and are willing to work with the official trade-union body, progress on productivity and long-term planning can only be limited in its effectiveness. This very afternoon the Prime Minister said that trade-union co-operation is vital. Can he not see the need to get reality into this idea of the recognition of the trade unions? How can the trade unions give of their best if the Government refuses to recognise them?

When heckled by Unionist MPs, Simpson challenged them to show that the Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU had ever displayed 'one iota of disloyalty to this country' or that it was 'anything but ready to help in the development of the Northern Ireland economy'.[2]

The debate on the Hall Report showed clearly that the only coherent proposals which were being advanced for dealing with the economic situation involved planning and the enlistment of both sides of industry in developing the economy. But Unionist hostility to the ICTU was an obstacle to winning the support of the trade unions in Northern Ireland. There was a rumour in November 1962 that the Government was to reverse its position, but later that month Brookeborough announced that there would be no change until the Northern Ireland Committee separated itself from the ICTU. A Unionist MP, Edmond Warnock, rubbed salt in the wound by claiming that the ICTU was a 'Republican-loaded body' and that the Northern Ireland Committee was a 'daughter in its mother's house'.

Nothing illustrated better the unyielding nature of Brookeborough's last years and it was inevitable that his administration

would give way to something different. The Government was under pressure from two different groups within the ranks of its own supporters: one which reflected the 'modernising' values found at that point where the British political parties had most in common and which has been called 'Butskellism'; the other from the 'populist' wing of the party,[3] which was anxious to preserve its links with plebeian Protestantism and which combined sectarianism with demands for measures that would benefit the less privileged. An example of the populist group was Desmond Boal, the only Unionist MP to vote against the Government on the unemployment issue. In 1971 he joined Ian Paisley in the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Some of the strongest criticism from a modernising standpoint came from the ranks of the Young Unionists. In February 1962 Bob Cooper, treasurer of the Young Unionist Council, was critical of the Government, not so much because of its economic policies, which he described as 'courageous' and 'successful', but because of the party's 'image':

> The man at the bench, the man at the office, the man in the University, have an image of a party which will brook no criticism from its members and a government of ageing tired men who cannot look forward with hope and who are forced to look back with nostalgia; who prefer to celebrate an event of fifty years ago [the Ulster Covenant] rather than to plan for the next fifty years.[4]

When O'Neill took over the premiership in March 1963 he set about changing this image. After twenty years of Brookeborough, he was a vigorous new broom; under his leadership the operations of government were streamlined and modernised. The Northern Ireland Committee of the ICTU was recognised and the trade unions were incorporated into economic planning and industrial training, but only after an attempt to involve individual unions, without the Northern Ireland Committee, had failed. The Government set out to attract new industries and outside investment to replace the worn-out engineering and textile factories and the declining shipbuilding industry. The landscape was strewn with new roads, hospitals, office blocks, housing estates and factories. Much of the groundwork for this was laid under his predecessor, and although as finance minister for seven years O'Neill had made a major contribution, the significance of his premiership was not so much

the physical results of this burst of activity as a style and rhetoric which made it appear as if Northern Ireland was in the rapids of change and that this change would bring improved material prosperity and communal reconciliation.

O'Neill was strong on gestures and bold statements. His meetings with Taoiseachs Sean Lemass and Jack Lynch have gone down in history, as has his attempt to bring President John F. Kennedy to the north, and his visit to a Catholic school which resulted in his being photographed in front of a crucifix and chatting amiably with nuns. There were smaller but equally significant gestures: he crossed the floor of Stormont to congratulate veteran Nationalist MP Cahir Healy on the eighty-seventh birthday of a man who had once been regarded as so dangerous that he was banned from visiting part of his own constituency; and he showed equal solicitude for Nationalist MP Patrick Gormley when he was injured in a car crash. O'Neill's vision was summed up in a speech in 1965: 'We want to build an opportunity state in which no man will be imprisoned by his environment and in which every citizen will have the chance to realise his full potential.'[5] He painted a roseate picture of a regenerated 'Ulster', with Craigavon, its new city with a population of one hundred thousand, contrasting with the 'haphazard development elsewhere in the Province'.[6] 'Our symbol,' he said, 'is the modern factory not the dole queue.'[7] This vision of progress was linked to his attempt to improve community relations. Pressure from the British treasury pronounced the doom of traditional industries and O'Neill knew how much Northern Ireland was dependent on subsidies from Westminster. Economic realities demanded that Northern Ireland move closer to the mainstream of policy, society and culture within the United Kingdom.

O'Neill's economic policies were already well established by the time he came to office; they had been tested by his department when he was minister of finance and, in any case, were derived from British experience. He believed firmly that Northern Ireland's economic future was tied to the relationship with Britain and that this more or less dictated the line to be taken on economic matters. The innovative aspect of O'Neill's premiership was his 'style', which consisted of making liberal and modernist statements and gestures, while using extreme caution in nudging

his party towards changes in its traditional outlook. The immediate impact of this was an upsurge of hope for significant and rapid change in Northern Ireland. In March 1965 the authoritative current affairs periodical, the *Round Table*, hailed O'Neill for

> thinking even more internationally. This is to say that in building up a better impression of Northern Ireland, chiefly in the interests of its industrial development, he has been anxious to show the world that it is not skulking in the backwoods . . . It is in keeping with his conduct as Prime Minister that he should show a power of decision, an independence of the old restraints and an ambition to prove himself master of the Northern Irish situation.

Desmond Rea, a Methodist, an economist and a liberal Unionist, saw O'Neill's successes in the 1965 Stormont general election as proof of a fundamental shift in Northern Ireland politics, which were now

> about pragmatic and not about doctrinaire policies. Mr Sam Napier [secretary of the NILP] is said to have said that the Unionist Party stole his clothes and in a sense he is right . . . The Labour men . . . have prodded Ulster politics in a healthier direction . . . but . . . in a direction that Captain O'Neill was not only prepared to follow but . . . to lead . . . Captain O'Neill presented to the people an attractive Unionism, non-doctrinaire and pragmatically based . . . His appeal was – from reason to reasonable men – a welcome change in Northern Ireland politics.[8]

On the nationalist side in 1965 *New Ireland*, the magazine of the New Ireland Society of Queen's University Belfast (QUB), noted the enthusiasm with which the O'Neill–Lemass meeting had been greeted:

> Men and women of every political allegiance, of every denomination, and of all classes welcomed the meeting . . . and in their almost universal welcome revealed the fanatics for what they were – a divided and meaningless rabble of inconsequential men whose apparent power was founded only on the silence of the majority.

In the same magazine a year later, J. Conor Bradley summed up the progress that had been made:

> At elections North and South, the issue of participation was largely removed from political campaigning, and Britain and Ireland signed

> a trade agreement which brought about a greater measure of integration between the two countries than has existed since pre-independence days. The Nationalist Parliamentary Party assumed the role of official opposition . . . and set about taking some faltering steps towards establishing itself as a serious political party. A general liberalisation of attitudes towards the Northern problem proceeded apace in the Republic, while all parties in Stormont echoed the feelings of the majority of people in welcoming the various exercises in cross-border co-operation . . . Despite the suspicions of a vocal minority of old-guard Unionists, practical results of the new policies are already beginning to be visible in the field of tourism, and 1966 should see many more achievements in other fields.

The point about the Irish Republic was important; changes taking place under the Lemass administration provided the counterpoint to what was happening in the north. As Robin Bailie, a liberal Unionist, put it:

> The Republic having rejected the notion of a Sinn Fein economy and a Sinn Fein culture, now seems prepared to cast aside the last remnants of Sinn Fein Political Philosophy and take its place in the world, in co-operation with the rest of Western Europe.[9]

In September 1966 the *Round Table* saw a

> wind of change . . . blowing across the [Southern] Irish scene. Old Feuds are dying out, old politicians are retiring, old resentments and loyalties are fading away. Younger leaders are taking over, and new issues taking shape . . . Poverty, not partition, is now the problem to be solved, prosperity, not separation from Britain, the goal to be won . . . age and changing circumstances have now at last caught up with the politicians and they must now face retirement or reality.

These responses demonstrated a series of assumptions: first, a belief in the primacy of economic factors; second, a conviction that there was a single, easily ascertainable set of policies that would achieve economic progress and that all 'sensible' people could recognise and agree upon what was necessary; and third, a linked assumption that politics was the art of efficient administration and that loyalist or republican ideologies were an outdated encumbrance. It was summed up in the very 'sixties' term used by Bob

Cooper in February 1962 about the 'image' of the Unionist Party, as if the essential reality of Northern Ireland society could be changed by altering the impression that unionism made on the senses. The liberals, modernisers and reformists had a clearly defined ideological position but they tended not to recognise it as such and underestimated the influence of ideology on the minds of others. They did not give enough weight to the fact that their own aspirations were based, as one young Catholic writer put it, on

> a deep anguish in the conviction of our present divisions and limitations and weariness of the resultant cacophony. A growing number of people want to see an end to closed circles that may not touch each other. They want to see instead mutual agreement and mutual integration. Realising that in the modern world it is disastrous not to be united, they believe in this we absolutely must succeed.[10]

Recognising the expectations of the reformers as aspirations, not realities, we can examine Northern Ireland society in the 1960s for evidence for and against their optimistic prognosis. One development that roused hopes of change was a series of discussions in 1962 between the leaders of the Ancient Order of Hibernians (AOH) and the Grand Orange Lodge of Ireland, known as the 'Orange–Green talks'. These arose from a proposal made at an AOH rally in Omagh, County Tyrone, on 24 August 1962, by Senator James G. Lennon, national vice-president of the AOH. Lennon spoke of the threat posed by 'international Communism directed from Moscow' and of the example given by Western European unity. Was it too much to hope for, he asked, that a way could be found to remove the 'bitterness and discrimination' which disgraced the public life of Northern Ireland?

There was an initial meeting between Lennon and Senator Sir George Clarke, Grand Master of the Orange Order, on 17 October 1962. On 12 December, Sir George announced that the Grand Lodge had set up a committee to discuss with Senator Lennon and his colleagues, but there was a catch – 'recognition of Ulster's constitutional position within the UK by the Nationalists would be our choice for first discussion'. Prospects of success were further diminished by a cool response from the Nationalist MPs and senators; they welcomed the talks but stressed that they were 'not on behalf of the Nationalist Party'. The two senators were damned

with faint praise; while the Nationalists wished 'success to their efforts . . . the full value of such talks will best be judged by results'. In the event the difference over the issue of recognising the constitution proved unbridgeable and the talks petered out early in 1963, having made no progress.

A more important factor working for better community relations was the ecumenical movement. One indication of this was an editorial on 3 June 1963 in the strongly Unionist Belfast daily, the *News Letter*. Commenting on the impending death of Pope John XXIII, it said that he had 'appeared to elevate his high office' and spoke warmly of the pope's 'simplicity, sincerity and courage'. The death of the pontiff drew messages of sympathy from Prime Minister O'Neill, the Speaker at Stormont and the Northern Ireland government. In an unprecedented gesture, the flag over Belfast City Hall was lowered to half mast.

A survey of young people in the churches seemed to justify optimism. As David Bleakley, NILP MP for Victoria in Belfast and a leading Church of Ireland layman, put it:

> It is evident . . . that Young Ulster, growing up in a world very different from that of our forefathers, is inclined to be more tolerant than those who went before him. The young man who, when asked to name a great Christian, could say: 'Well I've been brought up a good Ulster Presbyterian, but I still think Pope John was a very good Christian', was speaking a language quite new to older ears, but by no means foreign to his contemporaries. His comment was matched in generosity by the young Roman Catholic who wanted to see '*All* branches of the Christian Church' growing in strength in these materialistic days.[11]

The Catholic Primate of England, Archbishop John Heenan, visiting Northern Ireland in August 1962 to lay the foundation stone of a new Cistercian monastery, spoke of the 'new and precious friendship between Protestants and Catholics' and regretted the 'almost geographical' division of Christians in Ireland. At his enthronement in September 1962, the Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor, Dr William Philbin, said: 'Many evidences are showing today that a new spirit of reasonableness is asserting itself.' Shortly afterwards Dr Philbin was welcomed to Belfast City Hall for an informal meeting with the lord mayor.

In January 1963 there was what the nationalist daily newspaper,

the *Irish News*, described as 'a unique meeting in the history of the relations between the various churches in Northern Ireland'. The Catholic Bishop of Down and Connor, two Church of Ireland bishops and the Presbyterian Moderator dined together before attending a lecture at Queen's. In another lecture at QUB a Catholic priest spoke about 'the [Vatican] Council and Unity'. Religion and politics, he said, were inextricably mixed in Ireland, but now Catholics were learning that 'our Protestant neighbours are Christians too and that we have more in common than is apparent at first sight'. As a result of the Vatican Council, 'Catholics were coming to have a broader, saner outlook'. Presbyterians were also influenced by the council; at their 1966 General Assembly a former Moderator, the Reverend J. C. Breaky, referred to those who believed that 'Rome had never changed and never would'. He accepted that there had been no doctrinal change but he had no doubts that the attitude of the Catholic Church was changing. Fears and suspicions that the ecumenical movement might 'sell the pass [were] unworthy of the spiritual heirs of Calvin and Knox'.

In February 1964 the journal of the Irish Methodists urged its readers to take a stand against bigotry and in January 1965 the prominent Methodist clergyman, the Reverend Eric Gallagher of Belfast Central Mission, called for opposition to 'Protestant Fascism', which was threatening religious liberty. In June that year the Presbyterian General Assembly passed a resolution asking Catholics to forgive them for 'attitudes and actions . . . unworthy of our calling as followers of Jesus Christ'. They decided to investigate the problem of religious discrimination in Ireland and this was welcomed by the Church of Ireland magazine, the *Church of Ireland Gazette*. There were many joint services. In June the Moderator of the Ballymena and Coleraine presbytery expressed disappointment at the poor turnout for a Mass to mark Antrim Town's Civic Week. (The Ballymena Urban District Council had rescinded its decision to attend, after protests from the Reverend Kyle Paisley, Ian Paisley's father.) However, at a service attended by all sections of the Ballymena community, including Catholics, in St Patrick's Church of Ireland Church, Canon C. H. B. Craig said that 'one of the qualities of a good community was tolerance'. They had to respect other people and give them credit for being sincere in their opinions.

In pursuing ecumenism, leaders of the Protestant churches stood up to the Orange Order. In July 1966 the Presbyterian Church issued a statement refuting the charge, made in the Twelfth of July resolutions, that its 'advocacy of peace and goodwill towards our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen' represented a 'Romeward trend'. In February 1967 the Church of Ireland Bishop of Down and Dromore expressed 'disappointment' at the fact that the Belfast County Grand Orange Lodge had called for services to 'reaffirm their Protestant faith and determination'. He would assume personal responsibility for any of his clergymen who refused requests to hold such services. In September that year the *Church of Ireland Gazette* supported a Yorkshire-born curate who had brought the wrath of the Sandy Row district of the Orange Order down on his head by taking a party of boys to see a new Catholic church. The Church, it said, 'neither needs nor desires the gratuitous assistance of any organisations in ordering its affairs'. The demand that the curate apologise was 'so preposterous that there is a case for ignoring it completely'.

The political and religious leaders of the Catholic community were more optimistic about ecumenism than their Protestant counterparts. This was understandable since they had most to gain from a breaking down of religious barriers and because they were more united than the leaders of the majority. However, it should be stressed that groups in both communities were influenced by ecumenism and by its values of tolerance, reconciliation and rationality.

The hopes raised by ecumenism were not realised. Almost everywhere else, the movement led to closer relations between Christian denominations and to an erosion of old distrusts and hostilities, but in Northern Ireland significant minorities put up vigorous resistance. And just as the proponents of ecumenism saw a connection between increased religious tolerance and a breakdown of political barriers, many Protestants feared that what was on the agenda was what they interpreted as 'surrender'. Such fears were expressed by the Grand Master of the Independent Orange Order, W. J. McClure, quoted in the *Irish Weekly*, the *Irish News*'s weekend publication, of 21 July 1962: 'Rome is therefore unchanged and carries in her the same spirit of evil as in the days of her greater power to torment the saints. Others may compromise

and shake hands with this Hellish institution, but we of the Independent Orange Order will never bow the knee.'

At the 1963 Presbyterian General Assembly, the Moderator's tribute to Pope John XXIII was challenged by a minister from County Cavan. He was rebuked for his 'churlishness' and the minutes containing the tribute were passed without dissent. However, following the assembly, six ministers, among them W. Martin Smyth, later to become Grand Master of the Orange Order and Unionist MP for South Belfast, sent a letter to the Belfast newspapers opposing any compromise with 'the Church of Rome'. They could not accept that the Catholic Church was Christian in the full New Testament sense nor as understood by the Reformers. 'The hand stretched out to us' from Rome, they claimed, was the 'hand of absorption' and to grasp it would mean dishonesty or compromise: 'There is a difference between being charitable and being gullible.' A less reputable form of anti-ecumenical pressure was experienced by the minister of Fisherwick Presbyterian Church in Belfast. He complained of 'persecution by the Protestant underworld' after he had invited a Catholic priest to speak to his church in June 1964. A similar incident occurred in January 1967 when the Church of England Bishop of Ripon, John Richard Humpidge-Moorman, was invited to speak in St Anne's Church of Ireland Cathedral in Belfast. The combined pressure of the Orange Order and one or two smaller Protestant groups, including Paisley's Free Presbyterian Church, resulted in the cancellation of the invitation to the bishop, whom they denounced as a 'Romaniser'. Unionist politicians were also subjected to pressure. Phelim O'Neill, Stormont MP for North Antrim, was expelled from the Orange Order for having attended a community week service in a Catholic church in Ballymoney in June 1966. Nat Minford, Stormont MP for Antrim, escaped the same fate when he explained to a meeting of the Antrim County Grand Lodge that he had attended a Catholic service only as part of the opening ceremony for a new school. In Larne, Jack McAuley, a former mayor, was less fortunate – he was expelled from his lodge in July 1967 for attending the wedding of a Catholic friend. Its members did not object to his attending the reception, but to the fact that he had gone to the wedding Mass as well.

The Orange Order's strong opposition to ecumenism seriously

undermined the official leaders of the Protestant churches. The order had many more opportunities for getting its message across to rank-and-file Protestants. The brochure brought out by the Belfast County Grand Lodge for the 1968 Twelfth of July demonstration, for example, claimed that those who advocated church unity

> would deny us our fathers' faith – gloriously battle-won at Derry, Aughrim, Enniskillen and the Boyne – in order to have one united church having the Pope at its head. [They] should cherish no malice or bitterness toward our Roman Catholic neighbour [but] in maintaining our Protestant position we cannot condone error and be true to God and to the faith of our fathers once delivered to the saints.

The leadership of the Orange Order was less openly hostile to the new direction taken by the Unionist Party under O'Neill. The Orange belief that Unionists should remain united, and a traditional deference to the office of prime minister, worked for a time in O'Neill's favour. But the ideology of Orangeism was strongly resistant to the message of tolerance and reconciliation that O'Neill's approach implied. Orangeism considered Catholicism to be a threat not only to Protestant religious principles but to their political liberties as well. Little, if any, distinction was made between fostering goodwill among church people and opening the gates to their political enemies.

In 1962 Protestants celebrated the Twelfth of July with their usual enthusiasm, but the *Irish News* claimed to have detected a change: 'It was not the same hysterical drum-beating flag waving political demonstration that we have been used to in the past, but had more of a carnival atmosphere on Continental lines, with the teenagers not waving so many Union Jacks but wearing sun-glasses and crazy-coloured hats.' Some Orange leaders supported such a change. In Ballymena, Dr Robert Simpson MP said that there was a growing feeling in mid-Antrim that the Twelfth should be regarded as a religious pageant rather than as a political rally. Over the border in Rossnowlagh, County Donegal, Brian McRoberts, the defeated Unionist candidate for South Armagh in the 1962 Stormont general election, commented on the presence of Cahir Healy. The veteran Nationalist MP was, he said, 'a man of integrity and charm'. As Father of the House at Stormont, he had the

'respect of all Orangemen'. The Grand Master, Senator Sir George Clarke, made a plea for a 'calmer political climate'. It was their duty as citizens to strive to 'ensure a better understanding of each other's problems'. While he commended the 'will and determination' of those who signed the Covenant, he wanted to see such qualities being used to enable the nations to 'live together in harmony and in peace, trading and assisting each other in great social undertakings and education'. In Castledawson, Major C. B. Clarke, Grand Master of the County Londonderry Grand Lodge, spoke out in favour of the Orange–Green talks and said that he was sure they would have the support of a majority on both sides.

Orange demonstrations, however, provided an opportunity for rank-and-file discontent to be expressed. In 1965 Sir George Clarke was heckled at the Field at Finaghy, near Belfast, by Orangemen shouting 'Lundy' and singing 'The Sash'. A Protestant Unionist councillor, wearing a collarette, distributed leaflets which denounced Sir George, O'Neill, the Church of Ireland Bishop of Connor and various other O'Neillite Unionists. The situation became extremely fraught and a fight broke out between two bowler-hatted Orangemen. In 1986, Brian Faulkner and Brian McConnell, Stormont government ministers, were heckled at Black Institution rallies, and in 1967, at the Twelfth rally in Coagh, County Tyrone, George Forrest, the Westminster Unionist MP for Mid-Ulster, was hauled off the platform and kicked unconscious. In June 1988, Norman Porter, president of the Evangelical Protestant Society, speaking at the opening of a new Orange hall in Dungiven, County Derry, said that the order still had 'some Phelim O'Neills in it and they would have to go'. The moderate wing of the Unionist Party, he warned, thought that it could do without the support of the Orange Order but it would need to 'think again and keep on thinking'. This turbulence caused the leaders of the Orange Order a great deal of concern. A leading officer was quoted in 1966 as fearing a 'civil war or a split'. He said this at a meeting of the central committee of the Grand Lodge of Ireland, which was called to discuss the wearing of Orange regalia on Paisleyite demonstrations. He claimed that a majority of Orangemen objected to this and to a Paisleyite demonstration being advertised as leaving from a west Belfast Orange hall.

In its 1968 Twelfth brochure the Belfast County Grand Lodge

ruminated on 'the image of Orangeism'. Most Orangemen were decent, neighbourly and industrious, but it had to be admitted that 'there have been things which the institution cannot recall with pride'. There was strength in numbers but 'the Institution has lost out because its very size has made the percentage of bad members larger and therefore more noticeable. It has sometimes been poor in discipline.' The contradictions of Orangeism in these years were exemplified by an incident at the Field at Magheragall, County Antrim, in 1964. After a resolution 'welcoming friendship with our Roman Catholic fellow-countrymen' had been passed, a Catholic ice-cream salesman was expelled by a hostile crowd.

Among opponents of unionism, the popular image of the Orange Order was of a powerful, secretive organisation that manipulated Unionist political leaders from behind the scenes. During the O'Neill years, however, the uncertainties and divisions of the movement were more important. All previous Unionist prime ministers had enjoyed the support of this mass popular organisation. It had given the party multiple links and contacts with its political base and had facilitated a two-way flow of information and influence. Its highly respectable leadership had sheltered Unionist leaders from extreme loyalist pressure and had ensured discipline in the ranks. But during the O'Neill years the order gave out contradictory signals and failed to prevent the growth of a strong, extreme, minority loyalist opposition.

The indecisiveness of the Orange Order contrasted with the vigorous, unshakeable leadership given to his followers by Ian Paisley. The emergence of the ecumenical movement, combined with O'Neill's premiership, transformed him from a leader of fundamentalist Protestantism into a politician. He responded quickly to the Orange–Green talks; his Ulster Protestant Action issued a manifesto on 17 October 1962 denouncing them as 'a complete betrayal of Orangeism'. This was one of his earliest challenges to the established leaders of Orangeism and unionism. Paisley's roots were in Ulster's long tradition of turbulent street preachers. During the O'Neill years he was still very much part of that tradition and was as prominent in protests over religious issues as over politics. In October 1962 he received widespread publicity for his trip to Rome to demonstrate against the attendance of Protestant church leaders at the Vatican Council. In June 1963 he

led a demonstration to Belfast City Hall to protest at the tributes being paid to Pope John XXIII. This event showed how skilfully he could use the techniques he had learned as a street preacher for political purposes. The demonstration was technically illegal, and upon being summonsed, he led another march to Musgrave Street police station. Further demonstrations took place at the hearing and the appeal. When he was saved from imprisonment because his £10 fine had been paid anonymously, he sent a telegram to O'Neill congratulating the Government for having paid it.

Unionist leaders saw Paisley as a nuisance. Minister of Commerce Brian Faulkner denounced him for 'rowdyism' after his demonstration outside the Presbyterian Assembly Buildings in Belfast in June 1966, at which the Governor of Northern Ireland, Lord Erskine, and Lady Erskine were subjected to abuse. William Stratton Mills, the Westminster MP for North Belfast, accused Paisley's followers of an anti-Semitic campaign against a Unionist candidate in a municipal by-election. A 'high source' was alleged to have warned members of the Paisleyite Ulster Constitution Defence Committee at QUB that it would be inadvisable to continue with their plans. Paisley called off a march to the governor's residence at Hillsborough, County Down, after the councils of Holywood, County Down, and Ballyclare, County Antrim, refused him the use of local halls. He was also refused the use of Lisburn Orange hall and the King's Hall at Balmoral in Belfast. On the other hand, after a bitterly fought battle in the Belfast City Council's Estates and Markets Committee, an attempt to bar him from the historic Ulster Hall was defeated, and the Minister of Home Affairs rejected demands to prohibit Paisley's outdoor meetings and demonstrations. Most Unionist leaders disliked the stench of violence that hung about Paisley. His protests had a habit of breaking into rowdyism, abuse and intimidation. There were constant rumours about his associations with shadowy organisations like the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). In June 1966, for example, Gerry Fitt, the Republican Labour Party (RLP) Stormont MP for Belfast, Dock, and Westminster MP for West Belfast, claimed that he had been approached in Stormont by two men who had been signed in by John McQuade, a Unionist MP who was sympathetic to Paisley. The men were from an unnamed Protestant 'action group', and they told him that MPs must realise that

Paisley 'must not be stopped' and that they were prepared to 'deal' with Lundys in the Unionist Party.

Various attempts have been made to establish a link between Paisley and the illegal UVF, and it seems that there was an overlap in membership between the UVF and Paisley's Ulster Protestant Volunteers. But no direct connection between Paisley and illegal paramilitary activities has been proven. Indeed the UVF members convicted of murder and conspiracy in 1966 had closer connections with the Unionist Party than with Paisley.[12] It ought also to be said that the aura of violence resulted as much from the opposition Paisley provoked as from the actions of his followers. In September 1967 his wife Eileen was subjected to abuse and missiles when she visited a development in a Catholic part of Belfast's Docks area. Only appeals by Gerry Fitt and an escort of RLP councillors got her out of the area safely. Some of the worst violence with which Paisley was associated was the rioting in Cromac Square in Belfast in June 1966. This broke out when he led a march from east Belfast to the city centre and chose a route that lay through the Catholic Markets area. The Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC) succeeded in keeping the two sides apart, but there was extensive damage to property. The affair highlighted Paisley's talent for posing the authorities with a dilemma. There was a tacit understanding that Orange and loyalist processions were excluded from Cromac Square, but if they had re-routed Paisley's demonstration, they would have left themselves open to charges of capitulation to republicanism. In the event the authorities got the worst of both worlds: they were blamed for creating the circumstances in which the riot became possible, and as a result of his behaviour Paisley was prosecuted and was able to claim his martyr's crown.

Paisleyism gave leadership and direction to a section of the Protestant population whose antagonism to the Catholic Church and distrust of Catholics made it ready to respond to his message. There was a sectarian culture in Northern Ireland that helped to shape its view of the world, but which generally appeared in more aimless and violent forms. During the 1960s there was a constant trickle of court cases involving sectarian violence or provocation. In October 1962 the Belfast RUC was reported to be determined to stamp out sectarian disturbances following the prosecution of three supporters of Linfield Football Club, a team which has an

exclusively Protestant following. The defendants were alleged to have been part of a group of youths which had tried to march through a Catholic street, singing sectarian songs. In November six Protestant youths were given prison sentences for assaulting a nineteen-year-old Catholic who had been visiting his Protestant girlfriend: 'Every night they have been "running me" because of my religion,' he said. Not all of these cases involved direct violence, and the most typical involved youths who were drunk, such as the group that was arrested for singing 'We will follow Linfield' while walking through Chapel Lane, Belfast, the site of a well-known Catholic church and grotto. Another example of the role of drink was the case of a thirty-year-old publican in Tandragee, County Armagh, who was convicted of an arson attack on a local Catholic church in January 1966. This incident reveals something of the arbitrariness of much of the violence. He had been drinking until the early hours of the morning and suddenly 'took a notion'. He ran over to the church, threw a mug of paraffin over the door and set it alight. Then he broke a window and pushed a paraffin-soaked, lighted shirt through it. He had also draped a Union flag over the church railings, and a passing milkman, who saw this, commented, 'That's a bad business.' The defendant replied, 'It will give them something to talk about.'

Other forms of communal antagonism flourished: homes, churches and halls were daubed with slogans; soccer fans clashed; Orange and nationalist bands provoked conflict, either by infringing on disputed territory or by evoking abuse from passers-by. Belfast Corporation had to discontinue band concerts in Falls Park in west Belfast because musicians were being abused for playing 'God Save the Queen'. However, many people disapproved of such behaviour: on two occasions local Falls residents, armed with hurley sticks, chased the hooligans away, just as a number of Protestants helped to clean up the statue of Saint Gabriel at the Holy Cross Catholic Church, Ardoyne, which had been daubed with red-white-and-blue paint and obscene slogans.

Another recurrent feature of the period was the communal tension which usually accompanied elections in Northern Ireland. In October 1964 the Nationalists demanded in Stormont that those responsible for 'rowdyism' at election meetings in Enniskillen, Dungannon, Coalisland and other places be prosecuted. Sam

Napier of the NILP compared the election campaign in west Belfast with Smethwick.[13] He claimed that a leaflet had been distributed which asked people if they wanted a Catholic for a neighbour. An NILP candidate complained that he and the republican candidate had been prevented from speaking by Unionist supporters after the announcement of the result in one Belfast constituency, and that his car had been attacked as he left the count.

During the Westminster general election of 1964 the Ulster Liberal Party contested Fermanagh and South Tyrone. Its candidate was harassed by Unionist supporters, but harassment was even more intense the following year when Albert McElroy, the Liberal president, contested Enniskillen during the Stormont general election. At a meeting in Derrygonnelly in November 1965, a crowd of fifty Unionist supporters surrounded the Liberals, preventing them from speaking. Stones, eggs and snowballs were thrown and the candidate and his election agent were assaulted. A few days later a similar incident occurred in Enniskillen; this time the RUC held back the crowd but the wires to the loudspeaker were cut and McElroy had to abandon the meeting. (These incidents showed the determination of Unionist supporters to prevent any challenge to their party from another Protestant; they reacted more strongly to McElroy, a Protestant clergyman, than to the Liberal candidate the previous year. By Fermanagh standards, that candidate had been alien and exotic. He was a Dublin-born Catholic called Giles Eden Fitzherbert, educated at Ampleforth College, Christ Church, Oxford, and the Harvard Business School. His wife was a daughter of the novelist Evelyn Waugh.) A crowd of youths sang the Irish national anthem and a republican song, 'Kevin Barry', outside the courthouse in Derry during an election count in 1965 and had to be restrained from attacking a Unionist procession. In 1967, Gerry Fitt was surrounded by Paisley supporters when he lodged his nomination papers for a municipal election. A Union flag was draped over his shoulders and on leaving, he was again surrounded and hit over the head. In 1968 the Independent and Liberal candidates were heckled after the count at a by-election in Lisnaskea, County Fermanagh.

One of the principal causes of communal conflict was the provocative use of flags and emblems. Sometimes this resulted in

violence, sometimes not, but in all cases what was involved was a very symbolic assault on the other community, such as when an Orange arch over the Coleraine–Dungiven road was burned in July 1962. At the same time three Royal Air Force men were beaten up for interfering with an Orange arch at Lisnarick, County Tyrone. As these cases show, such provocations were by no means confined to the Protestant community. In July two Catholic girls were arrested for singing a republican song during the Twelfth celebrations and a Union flag which had flown near the entrance to Moira Demesne in County Down disappeared. This followed a dispute caused by a request from the management of a local poultry-processing factory for the removal of a Union flag from the roof of the plant, where it had been placed by a section of the workers. In June 1964 a trainee nurse was bound over in Belfast for producing an Irish tricolour pennant during an Orange demonstration. In November a County Donegal motor mechanic was also bound over after having 'forgotten' to remove a tricolour from his car before crossing the border. The same month a tree in Bessbrook, County Armagh, from which a tricolour had been flying, was felled by an explosion, and there was a debate in Stormont about the fact that a Union flag had been flown over a school which was being used as a polling station. In March 1965 a youth was jailed for failing to pay a fine imposed after he had set fire to a Union flag at a demonstration in Clonard in Belfast. In June another youth was fined for having set fire to some red-white-and-blue bunting in Portadown, County Armagh. In July forty-seven employees of a religiously-mixed Belfast linen mill walked out after the management removed flags and bunting put up to mark the Twelfth. In March 1966 two youths were fined after a gang had gone into a Protestant area waving Irish tricolours and singing republican songs. In October a forty-six-year-old man was jailed for nine years; he had threatened a Catholic householder with a revolver and warned him not to interfere with Twelfth street decorations that had been fixed to his house. In Stormont, Austin Ardill, Unionist MP for Carrick, felt it necessary to scotch a newspaper report which claimed that Girl Guides were prohibited from carrying the Union flag in Keady, a mainly Catholic town in County Armagh.

These factors of elections, and flags and emblems as causes of

sectarian conflict came together in 1964 when Ian Paisley achieved considerable prominence by appearing to force action by the authorities against the republican election headquarters in Divis Street in the Falls Road area of Belfast. An Irish tricolour had been placed in the headquarters window and Paisley announced that if the police did not remove it, he would lead a demonstration into the area and do it himself, an action which would, inevitably, have led to serious rioting. The rioting happened anyway. On the orders of Minister of Home Affairs Brian McConnell the RUC broke into the premises, in front of a large crowd, and removed the offending emblem. Nationalists, republicans and Protestant liberals were angered; they claimed that the flag could have provoked no one since it was displayed in a solidly Catholic area. Paisley, it was argued, had gone out of his way to draw attention to this particular flag in order to provoke just the kind of conflict which had occurred.

The police had, in fact, taken a similar action a year earlier, when a parade down the Falls Road, to commemorate the two-hundredth anniversary of the birth of Wolfe Tone, was prevented from carrying the Irish tricolour. The legal position was that, under the Flags and Emblems (Display) Act of 1954, the display of the Union flag was protected in all circumstances and other flags and emblems could be banned if in the opinion of the police they were likely to provoke a breach of the peace. This gave the RUC a wide area of discretion, which they seem to have utilised with remarkable inconsistency. Similar action was taken against tricolours displayed at election meetings in Enniskillen and Coleraine, but on the Sunday following the rioting they took no action against a republican march down the Falls Road, carrying the tricolour. Republicans in Newry and Armagh were prosecuted in 1964 for organising Easter Rising commemorations at which the tricolour was carried, while in October 1964 the RUC in Newry refused to take action against a tricolour displayed in the window of the local republican headquarters, despite the fact that the republicans had tried very hard to provoke them. The flag had been put there in place of a smaller one, against which the police had said they would take no action since it was made of paper and did not count as a flag. In 1965 the Easter Rising commemoration in Belfast again carried a tricolour and no action was taken. But in Waterfoot, County

Antrim, a ban was imposed and the police allowed themselves to be cast in a sectarian light. The *News Letter* of 19 April 1965 reported:

> In reply to a remark by Mr Caughey [the organiser of the march] that the police allowed Orange processions to pass through Nationalist areas in Dungiven, Carnlough and Annalong, County Inspector S. S. Hopkins . . . said that they would never try to interfere with people who were carrying 'the flag of this country'.

The Divis Street riots, with their petrol bombs, water cannon and armoured vehicles deployed against crowds of protesters, were a dress rehearsal for what was to come later. At the time, however, most anti-Unionists saw the events as the result of a manoeuvre by the Unionist Party to ensure the election of its candidate, James Kilfedder. The violence was seen as an episodic phenomenon and not as an indication of a deeply rooted problem for Northern Ireland society.

In 1966 communalist incidents took on a more serious character than usual. There was a clustering of cases of arson, desecration, violence and intimidation. This, of course, was the year of republican fiftieth-anniversary commemorations of the Easter Rising of 1916 and of the controversy over the naming of the new bridge over the River Lagan in Belfast, when the governor, Lord Erskine, provoked Paisley's wrath by blocking a plan to call it Carson Bridge. It was also the year of the Cromac Square riot, of the blowing up of the Nelson Pillar in Dublin, and of the emergence of the UVF. In September, Lord Chief Justice Lord MacDermott told the grand jury at the opening of Belfast City Commission that 'it has been a period of some tumult, some rioting and violence . . . You may well reach the conclusion that the gunman has come amongst us again.' During the following months there was serious vandalism, directed against churches, schools, clubs, halls and so on. January saw an outbreak of teenage gang warfare in Belfast city centre; in February petrol bombs were thrown at an RUC landrover in west Belfast, at Unionist Party headquarters in Glengall Street, Belfast, and at a Catholic school on the Falls Road; in April the Catholic Holy Cross Girls' Primary School in Ardoyne was petrol-bombed, a hoax bomb was left on the steps of Bangor Town Hall in County Down and a telephone kiosk in Smithfield, Belfast, was

blown up; in May the opening of a new school in Armagh was disrupted by a bomb scare.

There was an outbreak of intimidation and sectarian attacks. In June, Unionist MP Nat Minford claimed that he had received threats to his life by telephone and telegram after he had denounced Paisleyism. In July, on the eve of the Twelfth, a Catholic man who lived in a Protestant street was seriously injured by a gang of some thirty to forty youths. Threats were made to burn him out and the windows and window frames of his house were smashed. In September a nun, returning to Belfast after thirty-five years abroad, was attacked twice during two months' holiday and two Catholic families were intimidated out of their homes off the Donegall Road, Belfast. In October two more Catholic families were intimidated out of Percy Street off the Shankill Road. In July the tenants' association in Turf Lodge, west Belfast, denied reports that Protestant families in the district were being intimidated.

The most horrifying aspect of the violence of 1966 was the responsibility of the UVF. A Protestant widow died in a blaze caused by a misdirected petrol bomb, an innocent Catholic was shot dead as he drunkenly sang republican songs and three Catholic barmen were shot, one of them fatally. The killings were shocking not only because they were brutal and unjustified but also because they were so arbitrary. This arbitrariness was a result of the UVF's incompetence; Paisley's newspaper, the *Protestant Telegraph*, was justified in pointing out the background of these incidents in 'the hell-soaked liquor traffic'. In 1969 loyalist extremists helped to precipitate Terence O'Neill's resignation by bombing installations at the Silent Valley reservoir in the Mourne Mountains. They were able to take advantage of a political crisis which should be understood in the light of the events of 1966; but such political significance should not be read back into the actions of the UVF in that year.[14]

Paisleyism, however, was of crucial political importance. In the early to mid-1960s it was justifiable to portray Paisley as little more than a spoiler, on the fringes of Northern Ireland society. But the emergence of the civil rights movement enabled him to move to centre stage; he articulated the fears aroused in the minds of very many Protestants by the civil rights movement. Sarah Nelson has summed up their response with admirable clarity:

> When the civil rights movement emerged a few Protestants were prepared to make a leap of trust and accept that Protestants must change both their attitudes and their policies. A larger group felt Catholics could never be trusted, that their demands must be fought to the end. The rest were to varying degrees unwilling to accept that Protestants had any major responsibility for Catholic inequality, for past bitterness or future reconciliation. Civil rights offered them no proofs of Catholic loyalty, and challenged their definitions at every point by putting the blame squarely on the majority. The movement also said: 'You are not the sort of people you claim to be, fair and freedom loving: you are frauds or hypocrites.' People's definitions of themselves were fundamentally challenged.[15]

Also, more basically, the very fact of Catholic mobilisation after 5 October 1968 was profoundly alienating for many Protestants. An example of this was the former Liberal supporter who wrote to Albert McElroy on 23 October 1968 asking to be removed from the Liberal mailing list

> because you *must* know that after Derry the position here is crystallised between orange and green and any compromisers have *no* chance . . . in this hour when every thinking person should come down off the fence. I take my stand alongside Rev. Ian Paisley mainly because I haven't caught him out in any lies yet and because he is obviously the only spokesman the true Ulsterman has.
>
> I am a bus conductor and I wish you could see the brats from St Patrick's School, Banbridge, singing 'What will we do with Ian Paisley – Burn Burn Burn the bastard', and now of course their latest hymn of defiance, 'We shall not be moved'. Well today I moved a few of them all right – OFF. I suggest you get out and have a look at Ballymurphy or Turf Lodge estates. Oh yes a few dreamers need to work amongst the minority for a few weeks.[16]

Paisleyism had two effects; it limited the room for manoeuvre of O'Neill and his supporters in the Unionist government and party, but it also undermined trust in O'Neill among civil rights supporters. Just as the right wing of unionism saw the Irish Republican Army (IRA) looming behind the civil rights movement, the left wing of the civil rights movement saw Paisley behind O'Neill's shoulder and interpreted the prime minister's hesitations and evasions as concessions to extreme loyalism. This made any reasonable settlement of their grievances impossible. There simply

was not enough faith or mutual trust to consider what kind of concessions they might accept, or which the Government could concede. This lack of trust, however, should not be too narrowly attributed to the effects of Paisleyism. By 1968, O'Neill had, quite independently of Paisley's actions, succeeded in alienating most Catholics. Paisleyism was important in providing the nationalist community with an explanation for what it saw as unacceptable in O'Neillism – it was believed that Paisley's pressure, together with that of the 'backwoodsmen' in the Unionist Party, had frustrated the prime minister's weak liberal instincts. This reinforced the communalist divide within Northern Ireland and it was an important part of the process whereby Catholic and Liberal Protestant opposition to the Government took to the streets – no other effective means of pressurising the Unionist administration had been found and O'Neill had done nothing effective to deal with the mounting frustration.

O'Neill's policies of economic development and political and cultural integration with Britain failed because of three fundamental weaknesses:

1 His economic strategy, as set out in the Matthew and Wilson Plans,[17] involved concentration of investment in 'growth centres' which would provide the initial impetus to stimulate the economy on a wider geographical basis. What this boiled down to was a grandiose scheme for the 'new town' of Craigavon, planted right in the middle of the Protestant heartland and named after a Unionist hero. Catholics, and especially those living west of the River Bann, saw this as a deliberate denial of investment to their areas, especially since the actual growth which was achieved failed even to turn Craigavon into a viable entity.

2 O'Neill tells us in his autobiography that he waited twenty-one months until he felt secure enough to invite Lemass to Belfast and of the secrecy he thought necessary in carrying out the operation. He is less candid about his often-repeated opposition, during the months beforehand, to negotiating with Dublin until the southern government recognised the constitutional status of the north. The meeting was not simply a surprise sprung upon his colleagues but a sudden reversal of a tenet of unionism that he had always seemed to endorse. It is hardly surprising that

although he caught the imagination of large sections of the public, he provoked suspicion and opposition within his own party.

3 The logic of extending the Unionist Party into the middle ground would have been to win over the many middle-class Catholics who wanted no part of the Nationalist Party and its fixation with the border. But the traditions of the Unionist Party were strongly anti-Catholic and there was no real evidence that it was changing or that the Orange Order had ceased to play an important role within it. O'Neill made no significant attempts to confront this aspect of his party until 1969, when it was already too late. In January 1966 the *Irish News* noted the fact that when the president of the Antrim Unionist Association said that it was 'impossible' for Catholics to join the Unionist Party, O'Neill, who spoke after him, made no reference to the remark. There were other apparent cracks in his liberal façade.

Despite the 'modernism' which he counterposed to traditional unionism, many of his speeches about economic regeneration appealed to those same traditions. In his 'Pottinger' speech of November 1962, in which as finance minister he set out the main lines of his economic policy, he summoned up the ghosts of the signatories of the Covenant of 1912 and commended the spirit which motivated them as one which must now drive 'Ulstermen' on to new initiatives and development. His speeches are full of references to the hard-working, enterprising, straightforward people of Northern Ireland; the new Ulster would, it seemed, be built on the solid foundations of the Protestant work ethic and it would still, he assured his listeners, be the 'Ulster of Carson and Craig'. He often reiterated his determination to uphold the Union and his opposition to Irish unity. But he went further: in a speech to the Scots-Irish Association of Philadelphia in September 1963 he stressed the separate identity of the northern Protestants. The Scots-Irish of the north, he claimed, were as different from the rest of the Irish people as 'chalk from cheese'.

There were other significant actions. O'Neill's speech of May 1969, in which he said that if Catholics were given good jobs and houses they would behave like Protestants, was a serious blunder which has often been quoted. But two years earlier, in May 1967,

he had to apologise to Stormont for having read to the House a forged letter purporting to come from a 'loyal Falls Road Catholic', which claimed that Catholics were instructed from the pulpit not to employ Protestants and to boycott Protestant shops. In 1964 he joined the Ahoghill Royal Black Preceptory number 173 and became entitled to wear the black collarette as well as those of the Orange Order and the Apprentice Boys of Derry. That year he was also prominent in the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of the Larne gun-running.[18] All of this meant that Catholics were not just being asked to embrace modernisation and reconciliation. Quite apart from the problem of whether or not the Unionist Party would open its doors to them, they were being asked to swallow part of a tradition that was alien to them. It was hardly surprising that the Nationalists returned to hostility to the Government in 1966 after a flirtation following the Lemass visit. In October, D. MacDonnell, writing a political commentary in the *Irish Weekly* in October 1966, discussed the disputes within the ruling party:

> The only divergence of opinion amongst these groups is the means to their common end . . . the perpetuation of the intolerant ascendancy of the Unionist Party and its masters in the Orange Order.
>
> Mr O'Neill's method has been to camouflage his Government's policy of discrimination from the outside world by expressions and gestures of friendship across the Border, coupled with hopes of better relations in some undetermined future era. One would look in vain for a single positive step by his Government towards ending discrimination.

Later that month James O'Reilly, Nationalist MP for Mourne, said that O'Neill was 'a man of fair words and few actions' who had 'done nothing to set the machinery of reform in motion', and Austin Currie, the young Nationalist MP for East Tyrone, said that O'Neill realised what was necessary and had spoken of building bridges and partnership, 'but unfortunately he has given no indication that he is tackling the problem or is going to do so'. A month later Harry Diamond, RLP MP for Falls, accused O'Neill of evasion. His attitude had 'brought a halt to any prospect of reform'. Diamond's colleague Gerry Fitt was more generous, saying that he thought that the Government wished to introduce some 'simple reforms' but were being held back by the backwoodsmen of its own

party. He reminded O'Neill, however, that 'people who were suffering injustice were not prepared to wait forever'. In February 1967 Patrick Gormley, Nationalist MP for Mid-Londonderry, echoed the idea that O'Neill was being held back by his party and called on him to 'honestly admit the bigotry within it'. In April, Eddie McAteer, Nationalist MP for Foyle and leader of the Nationalist Party, was angered by a television interview in which, he claimed, O'Neill had taken the credit for the Nationalists becoming the official opposition. He threatened that they would withdraw and said: 'The harsh fact remains that Captain O'Neill is simply a reincarnated Lord Brookeborough with a rather more plausible face.'

Disillusion in O'Neill had a number of causes. Exaggerated hopes about change were shown to be false by the communal conflicts of 1964 and 1966. The 1965 Stormont general election showed that the Unionist Party was more firmly in control than it had been since 1949. And a return to political mudslinging could only be expected after the rather artificial good will that followed the Lemass visit in January 1965. But in 1962 there had appeared to be a real break with the past. The IRA cease-fire removed one source of communal bitterness and there was widespread dissatisfaction with the old politics. The middle ground became more substantial and was occupied not just by the NILP but by the Liberals and groups within the Nationalist and Unionist camps. The growth of a left wing – admittedly small – showed that some, mainly university-educated, young people were responding to political ideas quite outside the traditional frame of reference. This helped to create a new opposition which, frustrated by the lack of real change, sought for new ways to bring it about.

The new opposition politics was created by dissatisfaction at the failure of the Unionists to solve the economic problems of Northern Ireland and by the irrelevance of Nationalist politics to such issues. But it was an episodic phenomenon which did not touch the roots of communalism in Northern Ireland society. The continuation of grass-roots sectarian conflict showed that the potential for another bout of communal polarisation still existed.