

Study of newspaper article

Media



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The article in The Independent, dated Tuesday 4th September 2001, is an intelligent discussion over a situation in the town of Aerodyne, Belfast, and Northern Ireland.

In Belfast a group of rioting Loyalists have been fiercely trying to intimidate young Catholic girls from going to their centre of education. The loyalists are protestant members of the community who are loyal to the idea of Northern Ireland remaining a part of Great Britain.

The girls attend Holy Cross Catholic Girls Primary School and this was to be their first day of term, but they were forced to be escorted the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). The RUC is the Northern Irish Police that is largely a protestant organisation. This has too contributed much to Northern Ireland's Catholic unrest as the opportunities for employment in this force has been restricted for them and they have been subject to vast quantity of racial discrimination in the work place.

The Catholic parents on their way to taking their children to school are reluctant to relinquish the right to walk that route to school as they feel they should be allowed, whereas the Protestants feel this is an act of rebellion or defiance against them. It was seen as an act of 'Catholic encroachment' or growth in a protestant area and so the loyalists want to close the entrance to the school as it is far short of nationalist grounds. The term nationalist is applied to those citizens of Northern Ireland who are Catholic and/or want Ireland to be re-united as one Republic.

The article tells of warnings that have been issued by The Red Hand Defenders, a group of militant pro-protestants, that the gate will have to be

closed or they will continue the intimidation. The article also indicated the Catholics were called 'Fenian scum' which is derogatory term given to Catholics and they also insulted them with worse.

The article goes on to comment on the extra motivation involved at the Protestants end of things. The Catholic children's parents were know activists, which means they are active in the Catholic community and promoting their ideas, and this was seen as a preverbal slap-in-the-face.

They do not wish to give up the right to walk down a public road and the unionists don't want to let them.

The article continues to say about the local government's reaction where local MP Nigel Dodds criticises the heavy-handed tactics used by both parties when young children were at risk.

Section B: How have the past events caused these problems?

When looking at the article the main problems are apparent quickly. There have been complaints and accusations leading to a territorial battle all summer where angry loyalists have been claiming the Catholics have been attacking their homes. This has intensified their view that Catholics should keep to their areas and not randomly wander into theirs (Somewhat contradictory given the protestant view that Orange marches should be allowed through largely Catholic areas). Catholics are however keen to defy this notion and feel they are entitled to take their children to school there. This dispute over territory has deep roots leading back into history.

Catholicism was introduced into Ireland when it was a united country and not part of Great Britain. Its development from Celtic pagan groups, coincided with the spread of Catholicism across the whole of Europe, mainland Britain included.

During the Reformation, England changed its religion following the countries excommunication from Rome. Henry VIII, in establishing the Church Of England, himself as defender of the faith and persecution Catholics, created political tensions. Henry, considering himself and mainland Britain vulnerable from Catholic regions such as Spain and France, desired control of Ireland as it could be seen as a potential stepping-stone towards invasion.

Henry despatched English Protestants in an attempt to control Ireland and key positions of economic power were given to Henry's appointees. In the reign of the Tudors commenced a roller coaster of religious change in England with the Tudor royals being varied in belief from Catholic and protestant. This led to many changes and influences in Ireland. Although King Henry VIII could not conquer, this battle was continued after him and in 1598 Elizabeth's war against the Catholic rebels was launched. She conquered many pieces of land and gave the ownership to her loyal protestant followers. This caused great resentment towards the Protestants.

Ireland was then conquered in 1690 and English and Scottish landowners were encouraged to settle in the Ulster regions. The transfer of land to 'loyalists' left Catholics significantly lacking in the power they once had and this contributed to the resentment common today. The arrival of Protestants sparked much violence and dispute and so land was divided so catholic and

protestant did not mix. This policy continued into the reign of the Stuarts. These divisions were referred to as plantations. Demarcation of areas was more prevalent in the North, where the power base of the protestant community emerged.

The newspaper article refers to 'territorial conflicts' and in this incidence why Catholic's feel they have the right to walk in a public area. The Catholics feel angry that their land, their livelihood and homes have been taken from them.

The beginning of emancipation in 1829 allowed some Catholic repossession of land. A government, fearful of rebellion, sort to pacify the Catholic community.

Disputes over the English throne concerning James II, a Catholic king, saw protestant troops trapped and starving. The British government, wishing William of Orange to take the throne, encouraged his arrival in Ireland to quell the Catholic 'rebellion.' William was a Dutch royal who was married to James daughter and was summoned to end the fighting. He rode in and restored faith to the diminished Catholic army and defeated James' army. The Protestants of Ireland will remember this intensive suffering and this gives cause for their grievances today as well as other battling events. There are marches praising William's victory too. The orange marches take place every year in honour of the event and this will rekindle the discontent between the two religions further.

Over the next 200 or so years, the culture of religious division became stronger and the socialisation of children into their religious community, further entrenched religious stereotypes.

During the time of World War I, the Troubles in Ireland came under yet more scrutiny, as Northern Ireland was part of Britain it was expected to provide troops. The government were locked in talks at the time with Ireland regarding the giving back of Ireland to the people so it could again become a Catholic Republic and one country. When asking for these troops however there were little interest besides the Ulstermen whom did not wish to help if the cause unless the government promised not to release Ireland and leave the loyalists out in the cold. They did this and so have been stuck in a position where they could not assist the problems as to betraying one side or another.

The only solution reached by a pressurised government was Partition, a ruling leaving the South of Ireland as a free Republic and the North as a part of Great Britain. This complete division of the country did nothing towards solving these dilemmas and, if anything, created more. Partition left Northern Ireland as a community divided by religion and Catholics had no intention of commuting. They were naturally unhappy that their region, now run by the Protestants, was a pit of Catholic discrimination. All positions of economic authority and importance were assigned to 'loyalists,' contrary to Catholic protests. The Catholic civil rights movement came to life as they marched and protested for political equality. These were often a catalyst for violence and many riots including 'Bloody Sunday.'

Members of the People's Democracy began a four-day march from Belfast across Northern Ireland to Derry. The Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association and some nationalists in Derry had advised against the march. Over the next four days the number of people on the march grew to a few hundred. The march was confronted and attacked by Loyalist crowds on a number of occasions the most serious attack occurring on 4 January 1969. This led to much Catholic unrest as they could not express their views on issues and were denied the basic right to freedom of speech.

Catholics hold complete resentment for Protestants and most notably the presence British troops regarding the event that was 'Bloody Sunday.' During a great amount of disturbance in a Catholic region away from the riot and also out of sight of the meeting, soldiers in a derelict building opened fire. Also around this time, as a riot in a near-by street was breaking up. An order was given for a British army unit to begin an arrest operation directed at any remaining rioters. The order authorising the arrest operation specifically stated that the soldiers were not to fire on civilians. However, soldiers began to open fire on the marchers in the Rossville Street area. The shooting ended with 13 people dead and a further 13 injured from gunshots.

Most of the basic facts are agreed, however what remains in dispute is whether or not the soldiers came under fire first. The soldiers claimed to have come under sustained attack by gunfire and nail bomb. None of the eyewitness accounts of those shot saw any gun or bomb being used. No soldiers were injured in the operation; no guns or bombs were recovered at the scene of the shooting.

This is arguably the most famous event involving The Troubles in Ireland, and is possibly the best example of how Irish history is a constant influence on their lives. Irish Catholic rock band U2 recorded a song about the event and was a chart hit and the event is still talked about today.

A short-term cause of current unrest in Ireland would have been The Good Friday Agreement. The Good Friday Agreement was inspired by a recently elected Labour Government, which sought to bring all factions together to set an agenda for the future. A range of initiatives included devolution from Westminster through the establishment of the Northern Ireland Assembly. A restructuring of the RUC to counter its protestant leanings. All militant factions to give up their weapons. Most media has chosen to focus on the last of these and primarily has criticised the IRA for its failure to decommission arms. Less publicity has been given to protestant militant groups who have failed equally to provide the arms they agreed to provide.

As part of the Good Friday Agreement the release of 'terrorists' or 'political prisoners' from prisons was progressed and this has brought inevitable criticism.

The entrenched partisanship of both Catholic and Protestant are culturally, educationally, and economically engrained in their relevant communities. The protestant community sees all nationalist tendencies as the cause for unrest in Ireland. Equally nationalist groups, with Sinn Féin as its mouthpiece, point to the discrimination against the Catholic community that has long been part of life in Northern Ireland.

In the article, as you can see, the stubbornness of the Catholics comes from their desire to never give up when battling for what they feel is rightfully theirs. They all bear resentment for the Protestants due to events from history in its entire entirety and the same could be said of the unionists they dispute with. They too feel the Catholics are taking advantage of them and as their family have not done in the past, they refuse to give in without a fight. The children will also grow with memories of this event and will they bare a grudge? You would think so.

It is the case, with both of the views, that these opinions and accusations are amplified by the way the past is resurrected in Irish history and carried forward as part of life. Catholics still bare the hatred from when their land was stolen from them in the 17th century and Protestants still bear the rage from their homes being torched by many of the IRA bombings. It has become almost a natural hatred and part of their lifestyle and necessity to resent the opposing 'side' in this on-going dispute.

I personally feel that nowhere in this entangled web lies a simple solution to the Troubles. While both sides have ample causes to protest, the induced stalemate from the government of Britain due to promises made to both parties, the quick fix seems a distant dream. I have considered what I consider to be the key events in Irish history although there are many more points that could be considered. From these events I can see no clear solution to this issue. Perhaps the only way to advance would be to try to live with each other and let the past stay in the past. This would mean abandoning the trend of present day and not blaming each other but

perhaps the only way to proceed would be accepting this as a united Northern Ireland, not as a region in divide.